

“Let Us Go the House of the Lord”

Today we are looking at two psalms that are similar thematically. They are both about the joy and anticipation that God’s people experienced when they went to church, the temple of the Lord.

In Bible times each year Jews from all over the world would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to visit the temple of the Lord. They would go three times, spring, summer, and fall, to make sacrifices unto God and to celebrate God’s mighty acts of salvation in their lives; namely God’s freeing them from slavery in Egypt, God’s giving them the 10 Commandments for life, order, and holy living, and God’s sustaining them with manna when they wandered in the wilderness for forty years on their way to the Promised Land.

The largest collection of psalms about going to the temple of the Lord are found in Psalms 120-134 and they are called “songs of ascent.” One of our psalms this morning comes from that section. These psalms were sung and recited liturgically (much like we do a call to worship) as the people made their ascent to the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Yesterday I made my annual ascent (or descent since I was traveling east) to Durham NC to go Wallace Wade Stadium, also known as Blue Devil temple. I made my first pilgrimage in 1976 with my mom and dad to see Duke get trounced by Maryland 30-3. Being in the first grade and not really having any concept of the game of football at that time, I think I must have been the only person in the stands who waved his Duke pennant when Vince Fusco kicked the lone FG for the Blue Devils.

Every year since 1976, like the psalmist, my heart has yearned for that “lovely dwelling place.” Come spring time “my heart and flesh would be crying out” for Duke Football. Last year it was so strong that that “longings” began right after Duke’s bowl game against Texas A&M.

My pilgrimages have not been easy in my lifetime because we lost so many games during our 40 year wilderness wanderings. The years of losing led to fainting in the courts of Wade Stadium, tears, tantrums, and a few ugly words here and there. But finally, the school woke up about ten years ago to the disaster they created and hired a Savior, Head Coach David Cutcliffe.

Like Moses, Coach Cutcliffe had a vision for what Duke could become again on the gridiron. In his first three years as coach he led the Blue Devils to more wins than they had in the previous twelve years combined, and in his last two years he has led the mighty Blue Devils into the Promised Land of 18 victories, an ACC coastal division championship, wins over three nationally ranked opponents, and two bowl game appearances.

So “I was glad when my heart said unto to me, ‘Let us go to the house of Wade.’” There is nothing like being there at the game. Yes the TV is more convenient but it cannot replace the Game Day atmosphere. On the TV you can’t see the Blue Devil Walk (when the players and band come marching through the crowd two hours before kickoff), the children can’t get their faces painted or play on the inflatable slides, you can’t see Bob Harris do his live pregame show on the campus. Then there is the fun of tailgating with friends and family. The smell of barbeque, burgers and

hotdogs abound. Also when you are tailgating you can sit under a shady tree, relax, throw the football around, and enjoy a nice cold beverage. Then there is all of the energy of being amongst a crowd and the excitement that it creates. God did not make us to live in isolation in front of a TV but rather He made us to be together. “It is not good for man to be alone.”

It’s the same thing with listening to a live concert record and actually going to the show itself. Not too long ago I and a couple of the guys in the church went to see a concert. The band we went to see had a DVD of one of their live shows but it couldn’t touch the experience of us being there in person. If I had a choice between listening to a concert on a CD and actually being there in person as a doorkeeper, I’d take being there. Being there in person is always better. That is the way God made us.

The point in all of there is that there is nothing that can replace the church and our being there for growth in the Lord Jesus and our call to love one another. When it comes to church people try many substitutes in place of it. I worship God on the golf course, out on the lake fishing, or out in the woods under the stars at night (all wonderful things) but none of them preach to us Christ crucified. No matter how close one may feel to God in such circumstances it must be stated that no tree, golf club, wave on the beach, or star in the sky died on the cross so your sins could be forgiven and you be reconciled to God.

Some temptations are more subtle. TV preachers. I am glad worship services are broadcast on TV, radio, and internet. I myself listen to some pastors on the internet for my own edification and growth. These media ministries can be a source of evangelism to the lost and they are also a blessing for shut-in folks, and for people who are traveling. I’m glad for all of the sermons and teaching available on the various different media outlets, but they are not meant to be a substitute for an able bodied person who is able to “go to the house of the Lord.” Remember nothing can compare to being at the ball game.

As I thought about these two texts and the desire they both give expression to for going to the House of the Lord I came to the conclusion that the strength of our desire to go to the house of the Lord is a pretty good indicator of our inward spiritual condition. So if you want to get an idea of what kind of spiritual shape you are in as a Christian then simply examine your inward desires as it concerns going to the house of the Lord.

If you are here Sunday after Sunday and you are really dreading the whole experience on the inside then something is probably off spiritually. If you’re here but all you can think about is the buffet at the Golden Corral, or when I’m going to shut up, or whether or not you are going to make it home in time for the Panthers kick off then something is off. If the only reason you are here is because your mom and dad or your spouse drug you here (which is not necessarily a bad thing) then something has not or is not clicking in your relationship with Christ.

I do not say any of this to beat people down but simply to make the point that the intensity of desire that the psalmist expresses to be in the house of the Lord can never exist apart from a right relationship with God. So when we look at these two psalms in light of our own lives and we begin to ask ourselves, “Do I yearn for the courts of the Lord?” or “would I rather be a doorkeeper in the

house of my God than to party down with the wicked?" we will begin to get a good picture of our soul condition.

How is your soul this morning? Does it yearn, even faint, for the courts of the Lord? Does your heart and flesh cry out for the living God? Are you glad when mom and dad or your spouse says unto to you, "Let us go to the house of the Lord? This is probably the biggest thing these two texts do for us. They lead to take inventory of our inner spiritual lives.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.