

The Mystery of Zion - Gleanings From Psalm 87

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the profound significance of Zion in Scripture and its implications for the church's identity and mission today.

Scripture: Psalm 87:1

Topics: "Church Identity", "Zion"

Description

Art Katz explores the significance of Zion as the city of God, emphasizing its importance to God and the church's need to understand and love it. He challenges believers to reflect on their relationship with Zion and the eternal purposes of the church, urging them to move beyond a privatized faith to a communal, sacrificial love for God's purposes. Katz warns against complacency and the dangers of worldly identification, calling for a church that stands for righteousness and supports the Jewish people in times of trouble. He highlights the need for a deeper engagement with the mysteries of faith, including sonship and bridal identity, and concludes with the joy that comes from recognizing that all blessings flow from God. The sermon calls for a radical commitment to the values of Zion and a prophetic voice in the world.

Transcript

His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" (Ps. 87:1-3). If He loves the gates of Zion, what ought our attitude to be? If we have difficulties in identifying what Zion is, how should we then love it? At the very least, we ought to be concerned with what Zion is and why it is so loved of God. If it is that important to Him, let us not be ignorant or indifferent to what this Zion represents.

We find here a whole lot of mystical or mysterious references: Zion, holy mountains, city of God. They are also found in the New Testament in Hebrews 12: "You have not come to a mountain that may be touched, and to a blazing fire. . . but you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God." The city of God is described in Revelations 21, where it comes down from above as a bride adorned for the bridegroom. These are symbols and profound statements that God gives as He attempts to draw us out to be engaged and to inquire what it all means.

He has engaged the psalmist by the Spirit, and inspired this piece of heavenly information; and He has likewise inspired John and the author of the Hebrews. If we are not occupied with what is dear to God, can

we really have significance as the church in our locality? For example, how occupied are we with the eternal purposes of the church that are given in Ephesians 3? If we do not know about them, how shall we give ourselves to them? If they are eternal, they must be mighty purposes.

If they are that significant, how much opposed will they be by the powers of darkness? It should have us asking all kinds of questions: What does God mean by church? Is it an aggregate of individualities who are willing to come together for a few hours, but who are otherwise totally privatistic, separated, and occupied with their own narrow lives? Should we not be having the same apostolic koinonia and quality of relationship that characterized the early church where the glory of God was upon it and the power of God was expressed through it?

What are we lacking that they had? What was the character of their life, where no man thought that what he had was his own? Have we been seduced by a worldly lifestyle that emphasizes privacy? Rather than going from house to house daily breaking bread, we would be offended if someone came in without first calling. What would happen if we would be closed in on ourselves alone, without TV, without distraction, and we would have to find our delight in the church? Would interacting over the Word of God be a drag for us?

The testimony of the early church was that they were "steadfast in the fellowship and in the Apostles' doctrine and in the breaking of bread." That was the matrix that God blessed. Great grace was upon them all. We don't see too much of that grace in our contemporary church life because it is reserved for a great reality, which reality we have very little knowledge. But we need to seek and obtain it, and somehow, it is all related to the word Zion. I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me: Behold, Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia.

These are references to ancient cities and kingdoms that had a degree of luster and fame in times past. They being cited because Zion eclipses them all. Those ancient cities have since turned to dust. They are all a piece of antiquity that no longer has any significance. But Zion is eternal and abiding. God calls it a mountain. Actually, it is more of a hill, not some great, towering peak that commands awe. It is humble; it is insignificant. But that is where God has chosen to put His name.

That is His dwelling place. That is where the Law shall go forth-out of Zion, and the Word of the Lord out of Jerusalem to all nations. Do you think that the world needs the Law of God? Do they need the order of God, the wisdom of God on how to live in righteousness? Spears need to be turned into pruning hooks. I once visited some friends in Fort Worth, Texas. The brother was an engineer, working with the company that produces the F-16 fighter plane. I was allowed a visit to the assembly plant, and I don't know if I will ever recover.

It was like entering another world. The people there were not so much human as they were zombies. I never saw such a strange configuration of men whose humanity had fled from them. There is something about working with implements of death that brings death. I told that brother to get out of that environment! Billions of dollars of the world's wealth are being expended on war planes, whose purpose is to bring death. Am I the only guy that is not thrilled for our NASA space exploration?

What are we going to find on the Moon-a rock? Do we hope to find moisture? Or is there a deeper motive to show that the God of the Bible is not really God? Are they trying to find creation elsewhere that the Bible does not explain? We are footing the bill for those explorations, while the world is steeped in poverty and starvation. Thousands die daily from starvation--lives that are abbreviated and stunted--while we are out

there in space, looking for rocks and moisture! How come we have not cried out?

How come we have sat quiet and played patsy without registering complaint? What kind of church are we? Where is our moral and prophetic cry? Where is our effectual life being lived? Is it here in the Earth, with its values, with its corrupt mindset, that is opposed to the faith and opposed to God however honorific however it is packaged, sanctified and honored by the world. Or, is your true residence in Zion? Paul said that he had his citizenship in Heaven--and he really did.

Men could not abide that reality in Paul. There were orthodox men who fasted and threw dirt on their heads and vowed that they would not eat again until this man was killed. There is something about Paul that was so offensive that they could not stand the sight of him. Wherever he went, he started a riot. He was threatening a whole system. Why is the world not as opposed to us as they were to Paul. How come we are so acceptable? Do you know of anyone who has vowed not to eat until that person is killed?

There is a little known English commentator called T. Austin-Sparks, who was given insight of an unusual kind. One of the things that he has written was a series of talks on Zion. I do not find anybody else speaking about it, or who had any knowledge of Zion, or had any intuitive sense of it. When I read the transcribed speaking of messages given at a deeper life conference in Great Britain, I just sense the man agonizing. He is choking, he is gasping, he is trying to find air, he is trying to say something that is in his spirit that has not yet reached the level of consciousness.

He is birthing something. It requires even more gasping and travail to bring forth something on such a holy subject that is so little understood or sought after. In one of his books, he writes of the controversy of Zion. He says, once you become identified with Zion, once it becomes a serious consideration for you, the enemy that has up until now yawned in your face and been totally unimpressed with your taking of cities or whatever else you intend to do, will now make a note of you and realize that you are a person or a congregation that needs to be feared.

You have crossed the threshold; you have come into a realm of consideration that is threatening to the kingdom of darkness, which up until now has not been affected at all by anything that you have done. Just take an interest in Zion. Just begin to direct yourself this way. Just begin to contemplate why such a city is so significant to God that he loves it above all the places of Jacob. You will be noted by the powers of darkness as one to be observed and watched, because you are becoming dangerous to their vested interests.

The Lord will allow this added dimension of opposition as the very grit by which he brings us to sonship. Is that a strange expression--to be brought to sonship? We are children of God, but are we sons of God? Have we come to maturity in a priestly way, where our one abiding passion is to serve the purposes of the Father, no matter the consequence to ourselves? For him, Christ, it was unto death. He is bringing many sons to glory, but he is not going to bring you against your will.

He is not going to bring you in your indifference. You are content to be a child and you can be a believer twenty-five or thirty years and never have advanced from the childhood of your first salvation. Have we come into sonship? Are we even moving towards that reality? Do we love the gates of Zion, because only son will love those gates? A love for the gates of Zion saves us from identification of any lesser, earthly kind. Do you know what happened when Hitler to power in Germany?

The German Church watched the beginning from the "Kristallnacht" in November 1938, when many synagogues were destroyed in one night. From that time on, there was a progressive, systematic process of bringing Jews out of their apartments and houses and putting them in ghettos and sending them in freight trains to the places of extermination. The German Church remained silent. It went along with the national policy. They stood as if they did not see and did not know. "What happened to our Jewish neighbors, I do not see them anymore. . ."--as if they could not smell the stink of the burning flesh.

They had not the courage to stand against the national policy. They were more identified with Germany and its national aspirations than they were with the God of Zion. They were unwilling for the identification that would threaten their security, so they went along. They became the German national church and they had the German flag and a portrait of Hitler on the front of the church. They were discouraged from reading the Old Testament and were instructed to remove the Jewish believers from out of their congregations, or else they would find themselves in concentration camps also.

What if we were faced with such a choice as that? What if our America should move politically in that direction? Would we go along? We will if we do not love the gates of Zion. Where is our identification, where is our loyalty? Would we stand for righteousness in that day? In Germany, there was a very small confessing church as well as the national church. Many of the men of the confessing church found themselves in concentration camps. Unless we are willing for that possibility, there is no way that there is going to be a church that will preserve its Jewish people and stand for the God of Israel, and for Zion, when those very things are threatened.

There is a holocaust coming that will eclipse the Nazi time, because it will not be confined to Europe, but be global. Unless there is a church that will extend itself for Jews in their time of Jacob's trouble, in the time of fierce opposition and threat to their lives, not one will survive. That is why Paul says in Romans 11, "By your mercy they will obtain mercy." My own observation is that there is very little consciousness in the churches about Jews at all, or about Israel, let alone that they are at the threshold of one of the darkest hours in their entire national history.

Believers are going to be faced with searing decisions about what is their relationship with Jews really is. Are we willing to identify with them at the time of their greatest threat? When Jesus comes as King, the first judgment he performs is: "What did you do for the least of these My brethren?" (See Matt. 25). Jesus then goes on to speak about eternal judgment for the failing to do for His Jewish brethren. That one failure says everything about you. Your ability to recognize the least of these His brethren, and to extend mercy to them at risk to yourself, is the statement of the truth of your entire, personal and congregational life.

"Of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her" (Ps 87:5). Notice how few are born in her. This one and that one-not that many. My confidence is that the Lord is going to do this. His Zion is going to be an eternal glory. It is the city of God that comes down from above, which is the bride adorned for the Bridegroom. Will that adornment be more than fine clothing? Or could there be something of our character that has been shaped in a way to be appropriate to that one whom God has given us as an eternal spouse.

How many of us have the consciousness of bridal relationship with Christ and desire that? Think of the categories I am putting before you; sonship, bridal identity, citizenship in Zion, dwelling in Zion. This is not an effort to find some strange, esoteric things to strike a novel note. These are nuts and bolts, quintessential elements of true faith. But they have been lost to us-lost, because they have not been

contended for. Contend for the faith is far more than the totality of its doctrines.

You have got to invest yourself in this. This has got to be high priority. You can not conceive of leaving the house in the morning without having sought the Lord first. He will open these things to you, he will reveal them. They are mysteries that are being withheld. He does not allow the curious to dabble in these holy, ultimate things. You have to invest yourself, and be willing to make your life count for the kingdom of God, anticipating the coming of the King. The one investing himself knows that the King will not come except Israel first be restored.

He knows that Israel will not be restored without first going through its last time of anguish and chastening called the time of Jacob's trouble. He knows that it is going to come even to our own backyard in our out-of-way places. He knows that it is going to require from us a mercy and a willingness to extend ourselves sacrificially, taking the risk even of death. But not counting that too much, but rather counting it privilege, because it will obtain for us a crown. Who thinks in those terms?

A crown? When? In the life to come. Eternal reward is given for sacrifice and suffering and self-denial in this life. Who thinks along these lines? No wonder our kids are freaking out and there is nothing to engage them. The statement of the truth of what we are about is the statement of the degree to which those kids recognize the seriousness of it. If they are yawning, if they are bored, if they are poking each other in the ribs in the back of the congregation waiting for the thing to be over to get back to where the real things are in front of the TV-set or the computer games or their sports, their drugs or sex, we have failed apostolically to engage them.

They are not persuaded that what we are about is compelling and requires their own participation. And they are right. Measure your success by the way in which your own youth are affected. Do not try to give them the rock beat in your choruses, hoping that somehow this will be the answer to keep them in church. They need something much deeper than the superficial equivalent to the world's culture that they like. This ends in a very beautiful way: They that sing as well as they that dance shall say, "All my fountains are in Thee."

Singers and dancers are not a professional caste. These are non-professional singers and dancers. They do not sing and dance because they are paid for it, nor because they have musical ability. Maybe their voices are creaky, maybe their dancing is awkward, but they cannot contain themselves. There is a joy, there is a reality, there is a worship, there is an acknowledgment of God as God that compels song and compels dance-and God loves it, not for its professional impressiveness, but for its truth.

Singing and dancing are ultimate expressions of body and soul, of voice and what we are giving to God out of the depths of our being because he is God, because we know him and we love him, because we appreciate Zion. Singers and dancers alike say, "All my fountains are in Thee." Note it is 'all' my fountains, not some of them. Even my singing and my dancing springs out of You. It is not something I perform out of some charismatic thing that I am cued in to do. I cannot contain myself. The springs of it requires this depth of expression. All my springs (fountains) are in You. A transcribed and edited message.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/art-katz/the-mystery-of-zion-gleanings-from-psalm-87/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net