

Exposition on Psalm 48

by St. Augustine

The sermon is an exposition of Psalm 48, highlighting the Church of Christ as the firmament of heaven, the city of God, and the place where God is known and His glory is seen.

Scripture: Genesis 1:6, Psalm 47:1-48, Isaiah 2:3, Jeremiah 10:11, John 1:11, 1 Timothy 3:15

Topics: "Church Unity", "Gods Mercy"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the significance of the Church of Christ as the firmament, symbolizing strength and resistance to worldly temptations. He emphasizes the importance of praising and acknowledging the greatness of the Lord, especially in the city of God, where His presence is known and His glory proclaimed. The sermon delves into the unity of believers from different backgrounds, symbolized by the mountains of Zion, and the transformation of those once in darkness to become part of the city of the great King. St. Augustine also highlights the mercy of God received by a chosen people amidst a larger population, urging them to embrace the might of Zion and set their hearts on love and righteousness.

Transcript

1. The title of this Psalm is, A song of praise, to the sons of Korah, on the second day of the week. Concerning this what the Lord deigns to grant receive ye like sons of the firmament. For on the second day of the week, that is, the day after the first which we call the Lord's day, which also is called the second week-day, was made the firmament of Heaven. Genesis 1:6-8 ...The second day of the week then we ought not to understand but of the Church of Christ: but the Church of Christ in the Saints, the Church of Christ in those who are written in Heaven, the Church of Christ in those who to this world's temptations yield not. For they are worthy of the name of firmament. The Church of Christ, then, in those who are strong, of whom says the Apostle, We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, Romans 15:1 is called the firmament. Of this it is sung in this Psalm. Let us hear, acknowledge, associate, glory, reign. For Her called firmament, hear also in the Apostolic Epistles, the pillar and firmament of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15 ...

2. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised Psalm 47:1....That is, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. This is the city set upon an hill, which cannot be hid: this is the candle which is not hidden under a bushel, Matthew 5:14-15 to all known, to all proclaimed. Yet are not all men citizens thereof, but they in whom great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. What then is that city: let us see whether perhaps, since it is said, In the city of our God, in His holy mountain, we ought not to enquire for this mountain where also

we may be heard....What then is that mountain, brethren? One is it with great care to be enquired for, with great solicitude investigated, with labour also to be occupied and ascended. But if in any part of the earth it is, what shall we do? Shall we go abroad out of our own country, that to that mountain we may arrive? Nay, then we are abroad, when in it we are not. For that is our city, if we are members of the King, who is the head of the same city....For there was a certain corner-stone contemptible, whereat the Jews stumbled, Romans 9:32 cut out of a certain mountain without hands, that is, coming of the kingdom of the Jews without hands, because human operation went not with Mary of whom was born Christ. Matthew 1:16 But if that stone, when the Jews stumbled thereat, had remained there, you had not had whither to ascend. But what was done? What says the prophecy of Daniel? What but that the stone grew, and became a great mountain? How great? So that it filled the whole face of the earth. Daniel 2:35 By growing, then, and by filling the whole face of the earth, that mountain came to us. Why then seek we the mountain as though absent, and not as being present ascend to it; that in us the Lord may be great, and greatly to be praised?

3. Further,...when he had said, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain, what added he? Spreading abroad the joys of the whole earth, the mountains of Sion Psalm 47:2. Sion is one mountain, why then mountains? Is it that to Sion belonged also those which came from the other side, so as to meet together on the Corner Stone, and become two walls, as it were two mountains, one of the circumcision, the other of the uncircumcision; one of the Jews, the other of the Gentiles: no longer adverse, although diverse, because from different sides, now in the corner not even diverse. For He is our peace, who has made both one. Ephesians 2:14 The same Corner Stone which the builders rejected, has become the Head Stone of the corner. The mountain has joined in itself two mountains; one house there is, and two houses; two, because coming from different sides; one, because of the Corner Stone, wherein both are joined together. Hear also this, the mountains of Sion: the sides of the North are the city of the great King....See the Gentiles; the sides of the North: the sides of the North are joined to the city of the great King. The North is wont to be contrary to Sion: Sion forsooth is in the South, the North over against the South. Who is the North, but He who said, I will sit in the sides of the North, I will be like the Most High? Isaiah 14:13-14 The devil had held dominion over the ungodly, and possessed the nations serving images, adoring demons; and all whatsoever there was of human kind anywhere throughout the world, by cleaving to Him, had become North. But since He who binds the strong man, takes away his goods, Matthew 12:29 and makes them His own goods; men delivered from infidelity and superstition of devils, believing in Christ, are fitted on to that city, have met in the corner that wall that comes from the circumcision, and that was made the city of the great King, which had been the sides of the North. Therefore also in another Scripture is it said, Out of the North come clouds of golden colour: great is the glory and honour of the Almighty. Job 37:22 For great is the glory of the physician, when from being despaired of the sick recovers. Out of the North come clouds, and not black clouds, not dark clouds, not lowering, but of golden colour. Whence but by grace illumined through Christ? See, the sides of the North are the city of the great King....

4. Let the Psalm then follow, and say, God shall be known in her houses. Now in her houses, because of the mountains, because of the two walls, because of the two sons. God shall be known in her houses, but he commends grace, therefore he added, when He shall take her up. For what would that city have been, unless He had taken her up? Would it not immediately have fallen, unless it had such foundation? For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 Let none then glory in his own merits; but he that glories, let him glory in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:31 ...The Lord then has taken up this city, and is known therein, that is, His grace is known in that city: for whatever that city has, which glories in the Lord, it has not of itself. For because of this it is said, What have you that thou did

not receive? 1 Corinthians 4:7

5. For, lo, the kings of the earth are gathered together Psalm 47:3. Behold now those sides of the North, see how they come, see how they say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord: and He will teach us His way, and we will walk in it. Isaiah 2:3 And have come together in one. In what one, but that corner-stone? Ephesians 2:20 They saw it, and so they marvelled Psalm 47:4. After their marvelling at the miracles and glory of Christ, what followed? They were troubled, they were moved Psalm 47:5, trembling took hold upon them. Whence took trembling hold upon them, but from the consciousness of sins? Let them run then, king after a king; kings, let them acknowledge the King. Therefore says He elsewhere, Yet have I been set by Him a King upon His holy hill of Sion... A King then was heard of, set up in Sion, to Him were delivered possessions even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Kings behooed to fear lest they should lose the kingdom, lest the kingdom be taken from them. As wretched Herod feared, and for the Child slew the children. Matthew 2:16 But fearing to lose his kingdom, he deserved not to know the King. Would that he too had adored the King with the Magi: not by ill-seeking the kingdom, slain the Innocents, and perished guilty. For as concerning him, he destroyed the Innocents: but as for Christ, even a Child, the children dying for Him did He crown. Therefore behooed kings to fear when it was said, Yet have I been set a King by Him upon His holy hill of Sion, and inheritance to the uttermost parts of the earth shall He give Him, who set Him up King....Thence also this is said to them, Understand now therefore, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto Him with trembling. And what did they? There pains as of a woman in travail. What are the pains as of a woman in travail, but the pangs of a penitent? See the same conception of pain and travail: Of Your fear (says Isaiah) we have conceived, we have travailed of the Spirit of salvation. Isaiah 26:17-18 So then the kings conceived from the fear of Christ, that by travailing they brought forth salvation by believing on Him whom they had feared. There pains as of a woman in travail: when of travail you hear, expect a birth. The old man travails, but the new man is born.

6. With a strong wind You shall break the ships of Tarshish Psalm 47:6. Briefly understood, this is, You shall overthrow the pride of the nations. But where in this history is mentioned the overthrowing of the pride of the nations? Because of the ships of Tarshish. Learned men have enquired for Tarshish a city, that is, what city was signified by this name: and to some it has seemed that Cilicia is called Tarshish, because its metropolis is called Tarsus. Of which city was the Apostle Paul, being born in Tarsus of Cilicia. Acts 21:39 But some have understood by it Carthage, being haply sometimes so named, or in some language so signified. For in the Prophet Isaiah it is thus found: Howl, you ships of Carthage. But in Ezekiel by some interpreters the word is translated Carthage, by some Tarshish: and from this diversity it can be understood that the same which was called Carthage, is called Tharsus. But it is manifest, that in the beginning of its reign Carthage flourished with ships, and so flourished, that among other nations they excelled in trafficking and navigation. For when Dido, flying from her brother, escaped to the parts of Africa, where she built Carthage, the ships which had been prepared for commerce in his country she had taken with her for her flight, the princes of the country consenting to it; and the same ships also when Carthage was built failed not in traffic. And hence that city became too proud, so that justly by its ships may be understood the pride of the nations, presuming on things uncertain, as on the breath of the winds. Now let none presume on full sails, and on the seeming fair state of this life, as of the sea. Be our foundation in Sion: there ought we to be established, not to be carried about with every wind of doctrine. Ephesians 4:14 Whoso then by the uncertain things of this life had been puffed up, let them be overthrown, and be all the pride of the nations subjected to Christ, who shall with a strong wind break all the ships of Tarshish: not of any city, but of Tarshish. How with a strong wind? With very strong fear. For

so all pride feared Him that shall judge, as on Him humble to believe, lest Him exalted it should fear.

7. As we have heard, so have we seen Psalm 47:7. Blessed Church! At one time you have heard, at another time you have seen. She heard in promises, sees in performance: heard in Prophecy, sees in the Gospel. For all things which are now fulfilled were before prophesied. Lift up your eyes then, and stretch them over the world; see now His inheritance even to the uttermost parts of the earth: see now is fulfilled what was said, All kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him: see fulfilled what was said, Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Your glory above all the earth. See Him whose feet and hands were pierced with nails, whose bones hanging on the tree were counted, upon whose vesture lots were cast: Matthew 27:35 see reigning whom they saw hanging; see sitting in Heaven Matthew 26:64 whom they despised walking on earth: see thus fulfilled, All the ends of the earth shall remember, and turn to the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him. Seeing all this, exclaim with joy, As we have heard, so have we seen. Justly the Church herself is so called out of the Gentiles....They to whom the Prophets were not sent, first heard and understood the Prophets: they who first heard not, afterwards hearing marvelled. They remained behind to whom they were sent, carrying the books, understanding not the truth: having the tables of the Testament, and not holding the inheritance. But we,...As we have heard, so have we seen. And where do you hear? Where do you see? In the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God. God has founded it for ever. Let not heretics insult, divided into parties, let them not exalt themselves who say, Lo, here is Christ, or lo, there. Matthew 24:23 Whoso says, Lo, here is Christ, or lo, there, invites to parties. Unity God promised. The kings are gathered together in one, not dissipated through schisms. But haply that city which has held the world, shall sometime be overthrown? Far be the thought! God has founded it for ever. If then God has founded it for ever, why do you fear lest the firmament should fall?

8. We have received Your mercy, O God, in the midst of Your people Psalm 47:8. Who have received, and where received? Hath not the same Your people received Your mercy. If Your people has received Your mercy, how then, in the midst of Your people? As if they who received were one party, they in the midst of whom they received another. A great mystery, but yet well known. When hence also, that is, out of these verses, has been extracted and brought forth what ye know; it will be not ruder, but sweeter. Now forsooth all are reckoned the people of God, who carry His Sacraments, but not all belong to His Mercy. All forsooth receiving the Sacrament of the Baptism of Christ, are called Christians, but not all live worthily of that Sacrament. There are some of whom says the Apostle, Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. 2 Timothy 3:5 Yet on account of this form of godliness they are named among God's people. As to the floor, until the grain is threshed, belongs not the wheat only, but the chaff. But will it also belong to the garner? In the midst then of an evil people is a good people, which has received the Mercy of God. He lives worthily of the Mercy of God who hears, and holds, and does what the Apostle says, We beseech you that you receive not the Grace of God in vain. 2 Corinthians 6:1 Whoso then receives not the Grace of God in vain, the same receives not only the Sacrament, but also the Mercy of God as well....So those who have the Sacraments, and have not good manners, are both said to be of God, and not of God; are both said to be His, and to be strangers: His because of His own Sacraments, strangers because of their own vice. So also strange daughters: Song of Songs 2:2 daughters, because of the form of godliness; strange, because of their loss of virtue. Be the lily there; let it receive the Mercy of God: hold fast the root of a good flower, be not ungrateful for soft rain coming from heaven. Be thorns ungrateful, let them grow by the showers: for the fire they grow, not for the garner. In the midst of Your people not receiving Your mercy, we have received Your mercy. For He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, yet, in the midst of them, as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons

of God. John 1:11-12 ...

9. For when he had said, We have received Your mercy in the midst of Your people, he signified that there is a people not receiving the mercy of God, in the midst of whom some do receive the mercy of God: and then lest it should occur to men that there are so few, as to be nearly none, how did He console them in the words following? According to Your Name, O God, so is Your praise unto the ends of the earth Psalm 47:9. What is this? ...That is, as You are known through all the earth, so You are also praised through all the earth, nor are there wanting who now praise You through all the earth. But they praise You who live well. For, According to Your Name, O God, so is Your praise, not in a part, but unto the ends of the earth. Your right hand is full of righteousness. That is, many are they also who shall stand at Your right hand. Not only shall they be many who shall stand at Your left hand, but there also shall be a full heap set at Your right hand.

10. Let mount Zion rejoice, and the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Your judgments, O Lord Psalm 47:10. O mount Zion, O daughters of Judah, you labour now among tares, among chaff, among thorns ye labour: yet be glad because of God's judgments. God errs not in judgment. Live ye separate, though separate you were not born; not vainly has a voice gone forth from your mouth and heart, Destroy not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men. He shall winnow with such art, carrying in His hand a fan, that not one grain of wheat shall fall into the heap of chaff prepared to be burned, nor one beard of chaff pass to the heap to be laid up in the garner. Matthew 3:12 Be glad, O you daughters of Judā'a, because of the judgments of God that errs not, and do not yet judge rashly. To you let it belong to collect, to Him let it belong to separate. But think not that the daughters of Judah are Jews. Judah is confession; all the sons of confession are all the sons of Judah. For salvation is of the Jews, John 4:22 is nothing else than that Christ is of the Jews. This says also the Apostle, He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God. Romans 2:28-29 Be such a Jew; glory in the circumcision of the heart, though you have not the circumcision of the flesh. Let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Your judgments, O Lord.

11. Walk about Zion, and embrace her Psalm 47:11. Be it said to them who live ill, in the midst of whom is the people, which has received the mercy of God. In the midst of you is a people living well, Walk about Zion. But how? embrace her. Not with scandals, but with love go round about her: that so those who live well in the midst of you ye may imitate, and by imitation of them, be incorporate with Christ, whose members they are. Walk about Zion, go round about her: speak in the towers thereof. In the height of her bulwarks, set forth the praises thereof.

12. Set your hearts upon her might Psalm 47:12. Not that you may have the form of godliness, deny the power thereof, 2 Timothy 3:5 but, upon her might set your hearts. Speak ye in her towers. What is the might of this city? Whoso would understand the might of this city, let him understand the force of love. That is a virtue which none conquers. Love's flame no waves of the world, no streams of temptation, extinguish. Of this it is said, Love is strong as death. Song of Songs 8:6 For as when death comes, it cannot be resisted; by whatever arts, whatever medicines, you meet it; the violence of death can none avoid who is born mortal; so against the violence of love can the world do nothing.

For from the contrary the similitude is made of death; for as death is most violent to take away, so love is most violent to save. Through love many have died to the world, to live to God; by this love inflamed, the martyrs, not pretenders, not puffed up by vain-glory, not such as they of whom it is written, Though I give

my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing, 1 Corinthians 13:3 but men whom truly a love of Christ and of the truth led on to this passion; what to them were the temptations of the tormentors?

Greater violence had the eyes of their weeping friends, than the persecutions of enemies. For how many were held by their children, that they might not suffer? To how many did their wives fall upon their knees, that they might not be left widows? How many have their parents forbidden to die; as we know and read in the Passion of the Blessed Perpetua! All this was done; but tears, however great, and with whatever force flowing, when did they extinguish the ardour of love? This is the might of Sion, to whom elsewhere it is said, Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. 13.

What here understand we, Set your hearts upon her might, and distribute her houses? That is, distinguish house from house. Do not confound. For there is a house having the form of godliness, and not having godliness; but there is a house having both form and godliness. Distribute, confound not. But then ye distribute and confound not, when you set your hearts upon her might; that is, when through love you are made spiritual. Then ye will not judge rashly, then you will see that the evil harms not the good as long as we are in this floor.

Distribute her houses. There can be also another understanding. The two houses, one coming of the circumcision, one of the uncircumcision, it is commanded the Apostles to distribute. For when Saul was called, and made the Apostle Paul, agreeing in unity with his fellow Apostles, he so with thorn determined, that they should go to the circumcision, he to the uncircumcision. By that dispensation of their Apostleship, they distributed the houses of the city of the great King; and meeting in the corner, divided the Gospel in dispensation, in love united it.

And truly this is rather to be understood; for it follows and shows that it is here said to the preachers, distribute her houses: that you may tell it to the generation following: that is, that even to us, who were to come after them, their dispensation of the Gospel should reach: For not for those only they laboured, with whom they lived in the earth; nor the Lord for those Apostles only to whom He deigned to show Himself alive after His Resurrection, but for us also. For to them He spoke, and signified us when He spoke, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

Matthew 28:20 Were they then to be here always, even to the end of the world? Also He said, Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in Me through their word. John 17:20 Therefore He considers us, because He suffered on account of us. Justly then it is said, That ye may tell it to the generation following.

14. Tell what? For this is God, even our God Psalm 47:13. The earth was seen, the earth's Creator was not seen; the flesh was held, God in the flesh was not acknowledged. For the flesh was held by those from whom had been taken the same flesh, for of the seed of Abraham was the Virgin Mary. At the flesh they stayed, the Divinity they did not understand. O Apostles, O mighty city, preach thou on the towers, and say, This is God, even our God. So, even so as He was despised, as He lay a stone before the feet of the stumbling, that He might humble the hearts of the confessing; even so, This is God, even our God. Certainly He was seen, as was said, Afterward did He show Himself upon earth, and conversed with men. Baruch 3:37 This is God, even our God. He is also Man, and who is there will know Him? This is God, even our God. But haply for a time as the false gods. For because they can be called gods, but cannot be so, for a time they are even called so. For what says the Prophet, or what warns He to be said to them? This shall you say to them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall

perish from the earth, and from those that are under the heavens. Jeremiah 10:11 He is not such a god: for our God is above all gods. Above all what gods? For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. The same then is our God. This is God, even our God. For how long? For ever and ever: He shall rule us for ever. If He is our God, He is also our King. He protects us, being our God, lest we die; He rules us, being our King, lest we fall. But by ruling us He does not break us; for whom He rules not, He breaks. You shall rule them, says He, with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. But there are whom He rules not; these He spares not, as a potter's vessel dashing them in pieces. By Him then let us wish to be ruled and delivered, for He is our God for ever and ever, and He shall rule us for ever.

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