

The Church Is Beautiful

by Stuart Briscoe

The Church is a beautiful place where God is present, praised, preeminent, and working out His purposes, and where people can find strength and defense in their weakness.

Duration: 41:17

Scripture: Psalm 48:2-5, Psalm 48:8-13, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of deliberating on eternal issues and focusing on God's loving kindness, faithfulness, righteousness, and carefulness. The fellowship of the Church of Jesus Christ is a place where believers can come together to praise God and seek His guidance. The speaker encourages listeners to walk about Zion, to observe and appreciate its towers and bulwarks, and to declare the wonders they have discovered. The Church of Jesus Christ is not only a place of declaration but also a place of decision, where believers can confidently proclaim that God is their God.

Transcript

Psalm 48 is a beautiful psalm in praise of Zion. Zion, of course, being the ancient name that was given to what we now call Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the city built on four mountains, one of which, of course, is called Mount Zion.

It's probably over 4,000 years since Zion, since Jerusalem, or whatever we want to call it, first became a town, and it's doubtful if there are any cities in the world that have been the focal point of attention more over those 4,000 years than the remarkable city of Jerusalem. It has been the center of great historical, archaeological, political importance, but in addition to all this, which of course is quite obvious, Scripture speaks of Mount Zion, or Jerusalem, in a very special spiritual way as well. For in addition to her historical and archaeological and political importance, Jerusalem has a great importance in that she is a picture, or a type, of the Church of Jesus Christ.

And whenever you read a psalm in praise of Zion, it is perfectly legitimate, in the light of the application of these statements in the New Testament, to use it as a picture of the Church of Jesus Christ. That's why the title for my talk this morning, based on Psalm 48, which speaks about Zion, is, The Church is Beautiful. There's a lovely phrase in verse 2 of Psalm 48 that gave me the idea for this, Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion.

And so, that's what I want to share with you this morning, the sheer beauty of the Church of Jesus Christ, down here on earth, as it is illustrated for us in this psalm, speaking of the beauty of Zion. Now, of course, the cynics of the Church of Jesus Christ, and a lot of us who are in the Church of Jesus Christ, and aren't particularly cynical, but are thoroughly practical, might wonder if the term beautiful is not somewhat euphemistic. To say that the Church of Jesus Christ is beautiful would seem to be a little exaggeration, and, well, we could put it down to poetic liberty, but really, realistically, who's going to say that the kind of people who go to church, you know, all the hypocrites, and the kind of people who go to church, all the people who say one thing and do another thing, could really be called beautiful? I think we've got to be careful here not to confuse the local organisations, with all their faults and all their failings, and what the biblical concept of the Church is.

The biblical concept of the Church is not a lot of local congregations, many of whom are split within themselves, and many of whom are fighting each other outside themselves. That isn't the biblical concept of the Church. The biblical concept of the Church is simply the body of Christ.

And the body of Christ is composed entirely of people who have been born again of the Spirit of God, who have had their sins forgiven, who know what it is through the operation of the Holy Spirit to have been baptised into the body of Christ, and therefore, they know what it is to have their lives really committed to Him. They regard themselves as being members of each other, they regard themselves as being members of His body, they believe that they're controlled by His headship, they believe that they are infused by His life, they believe that they are the means of His locomotion down here on earth, and furthermore, they believe that they are caught up in the eternal purposes of God and that Jesus Christ is using them as the means of furthering the purposes of God down here on earth. Now, there will be a brief definition from the Scriptures of what the Church really is.

A far cry, often, from what we see in a local congregation. And when I talk about the Church being beautiful, I am not talking about this congregation or any other congregation, I'm talking about the biblical concept of the Church of Jesus Christ, which is universal, which incorporates people of every class, of every colour, out of every creed, that incorporates people who have come from every conceivable background, who are living in every nation under heaven, who have been, right down through the generations, brought into an experience of Jesus Christ, and who at this time will actually be meeting in all denominations and some of them in no denominations, people simply excited about Jesus Christ. That is the Church.

And you can call them Episcopalians or Methodists, or you can call them Independents or Baptists, you can call them what you like. The operative word is they know Christ and are committed to Him. That makes them a member of the universal Church.

Now, membership of a local church, of course, is an entirely different subject. The one basic requirement for membership of a local church is that you are a member of a universal Church. The one basic requirement that you would fit in to the corporate life of a local congregation, as I understand it from Scripture, is simply this, that first of all, you have become a member of the universal Body of Christ and you are absolutely sold out to Jesus Christ.

Then you fit in a local congregation. It's a beautiful situation to have people like this from all over the place, just absolutely one in Jesus Christ. That is the biblical concept of the Church.

Now then, there are a number of things I want to point out to you from this psalm that tell us why it's such a beautiful situation to be in the Church of Jesus Christ. First of all, it's beautiful because it's the place of sheer delight. Verses 1 and 2. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of holiness.

Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. The first thing that is so delightful about the Church of Jesus Christ is this. It is a place of God's presence.

It says that God is in this city. God is in this group of people. You know, one of the tragedies of the Church of Jesus Christ is that she has settled for the kind of things that the world outside the Church has settled for.

The world outside is great on promotion. The world outside is absolutely great on personality cult. The world outside is great on organization.

And, unfortunately, the Church of Jesus Christ has become great on all these things, all of which have their place because they are part of the divine economy. But the Church of Jesus Christ has become great on promotion and great on personality cult and great on all kinds of organization to the exclusion of the one thing that makes her unique. And the one thing that makes her absolutely unique is simply this, that God is in the midst.

And any church that simply settles for personality cult or settles for promotion or settles for organization to the exclusion of the one unique characteristic of the Church, which is simply this, that Almighty God with His arms made bare and His sleeves rolled up is alive in that congregation, is a church that is missing the point entirely. It is possible for people to be part of a church fellowship and become very dissatisfied, very unhappy. And this, of course, is perfectly understandable because it is composed entirely of people.

And one of the disappointing things about people is that they're people. And when people insist on being people, disappointment for other people is inevitable. But there's one sure way of not being disappointed in a church fellowship, and that is this.

Instead of majoring on people who incidentally are just like you, the thing to do is to major on God who isn't like any others. And to realize that the important thing about a church is not the people primarily. The important thing about a church is that God is alive in that group and it is incumbent on every single person, part of that group, to major on Him.

The lovely thing about it is this. When you get all kinds of different people majoring on each other, there are innumerable conflicts. But when you get all kinds of people majoring on one Lord who is absolutely superlative, conflicts fall away and He becomes, and here I quote Scripture, all and in all.

Now, this is the basis. This is the sheer delight. This is the beauty of the church.

It is composed of people who honestly, genuinely are delighted with the glorious truth that God is present in the midst. You know, one of the lovely things that would happen in a church if suddenly the pastor keeled over would be this. God is here.

One of the lovely things that would happen if everybody came to church one Sunday morning and there was no pastor and no preacher would be this, that no one would get in any sweat because the Lord would

be here. Do you know what I hope everybody would do if I got stuck in a snowstorm or if my aeroplane went down in Michigan or something while I was trying to get here? Do you know what I hope you would do? I hope you just gather around and you have a praise service and you just say, God, how wonderful you are. Isn't it absolutely fantastic that whoever doesn't show, you are never late and you never leave before time and you're always here and you are the focal point of this whole congregation.

This is the basis of the sheer beauty of the Church of Jesus Christ. God is present in her midst. But not only is it the place of God's presence, it is quite naturally the place of God's praise as well.

The psalm starts off with this picture of Zion. The fabulous thing about Zion, he says, is this, that the Lord is there and Zion is sold on praising the God who is present in the midst there. Now, here again, you can see what a unique situation the Church is.

You can see how utterly beautiful it is because there are very few organizations or the very few clubs or groups that are absolutely given over to praise. There are very few organizations on the face of God's earth where people from every conceivable background come together with a focal point that is superb and major on praising him. You know, the awful tendency for people is instead of to praise him, to criticize each other.

And of course, when you spend time criticizing each other, it isn't really a church, it's another club. The characteristic of a church is that it's such a delightful, beautiful situation because it's composed of people whose focal point is the living God who is alive within them and whose major concern is to live and to move and to have their being in such a way that they praise him in every single thing. That's what's so beautiful about the church.

It's sheer delight when we understand it is the place of God's presence and the place of God's praise. But thirdly, we go on to see that it is also the place of God's preeminence. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.

And I like those three words, great, Lord, greatly. In other words, we've got to get some idea of the one who holds any fellowship together. We have got to get our eyes firmly fixed on the one who is the sole reason for being.

Who is it? It's the Lord. And who is the Lord? He is the self-existent one. He is the one who has no beginning and no end.

He is the one who knows the end from the beginning, the alpha and the omega, the one because of whom all things exist and the one before whom all things will bow. Great is the Lord. And he is so utterly great that he is absolutely in control of everything that men and women will allow him to control.

As a result of this, he deserves to be greatly praised. In other words, he is totally preeminent. He is totally preeminent because of his self-existence.

He is totally preeminent because of his inherent greatness. And he is totally preeminent because he deserves nothing less than the absolute greatest as far as prayer, as far as praise, as far as adoration, as far as service is concerned. He has captured the hearts and the minds and the bodies and the beings of his people.

What an exciting thing it is to be part of Zion, in whom God is present, in whom God is praised, in whom God is preeminent. But fourthly, the delight of this place is that it is the place of God's purposes as well. For we find out here that this Lord is the great King.

It is the city of the great King who has come down from his throne in heaven and established his throne on earth. And the only reason that the great King, having established his throne on heaven, moved down and established another one on earth was simply that his will might be done as perfectly on earth as it is in heaven. You remember the Lord's Prayer? Now, here's the beautiful thing about it.

The area in which the Lord has on earth established his throne is the area of the church of Jesus Christ. And the reason that in the church of Jesus Christ he has established his throne is this. He has chosen the church as being the place of his purposes being worked out.

Now, you know something wonderful? When a congregation of people knit together with other congregations of people are caught up in the concept of a universal church that is the body of Christ, where God is alive, where God is praised, where God is preeminent, and all of them know that they're caught up not in feathering their own nest and not in majoring on their own cause, but caught up in the eternal purposes of the God who not only has his throne in heaven, but has his throne on earth in the church, then everything else fits beautifully into place. It is a beautiful situation to be in, to be part of Zion, to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ, the place where God is present, where God is praised, where God is preeminent, and where God's purposes are worked out. Are you part of that body? Don't confuse it.

I'm not asking you are you a member at Elmbrook. That's not terribly important. What I'm asking you is this.

Are you part of this body, absolutely caught up in the life and ministry and worship and delight of Zion, the city of the great king, the place where he established his throne on earth? Because that's what it means to be part of the church. But secondly, not only is it the place of delight, it is the place of defense as well. Verses three through seven speak about this quite graphically.

God is known in her palaces for a refuge. So we go back to the idea of Jerusalem now. Many beautiful palaces there.

The beautiful temple. The focal point of this beautiful city is the beautiful temple. The focal point of the beautiful temple is this, that God is known there.

Not only is he a superlative God, not only is he the God of eternity, the God who inhabits heaven, but he is now the God who is known in a certain place. And in her palaces, he is known personally as a personal refuge. Now, we've had this concept of God being a refuge constantly in the Psalms.

It, of course, is evidently an important thing. Otherwise, it wouldn't be repeated so constantly. We need to know about it.

Otherwise, it wouldn't keep coming up in practically every psalm that we read as we're working through them. Therefore, let's remind ourselves. The beautiful thing about the church of Jesus Christ is this.

God is known there personally and experientially because it is the place where his strength is known. He is known personally and experientially as being the strong God who has taken hold of weak people who

have fled to him and have found in him their refuge. You know, for some people, the hardest thing to do is to admit that they need the Lord.

For some people, the hardest thing to do is to admit that they have failings. For some people, the most difficult thing to do is to admit that they actually are far from perfect. But, you know, the glad thing that comes into a person's life when he admits he has a need and admits that he's far from perfect and admits that only the Lord can do something in his life.

The glad thing about it is this. He capitulates. He gives in.

He comes to Mount Zion. He identifies himself with Christ. He is caught up in the body of Christ.

He is identified with a body of believers and he knows the Lord in that situation and as a result, he experiences his strength in the area of his weakness. This is the beautiful thing about the church of Jesus Christ. You know, people are always telling me that the church is full of hypocrites.

And in one sense, they're right because everybody is hypocritical one way or the other. But in the other sense, they're completely wrong. And I'll tell you why.

The church of Jesus Christ... I'm not talking about local congregations. The real church of people really sold out to Jesus Christ is composed of only one type of people. That is, sinners.

That's the basic requirement for membership in the church of Jesus Christ. You must be a sinner. If you're not, you've no right there.

You shouldn't be here this morning because we've nothing to offer you. Now then, if a person has really committed himself to Christ or has come to God and found in him his refuge, how can you say he's a hypocrite? He's not a hypocrite because what he's saying to the world is this. Look, I'm such a sinner.

I need forgiven. I'm so weak. I need strength.

I'm so confused. I need guidance. I'm so unsure.

I need the strength of the living God. How can you call that guy a hypocrite? He's no hypocrite. He's the only honest person around.

He's the only one who has the moral fortitude to stand up and be counted and say, I'm weak. I'm sinful. I've got a need.

I don't care who knows. And only the Lord can meet my need. You see, that's the beautiful thing about the church.

Nobody needs to pretend. Nobody plays any games. No one lords it over anybody else because we have one basic thing in common.

We have all, as sinners, come to the Lord, found in Him our refuge, and we have one strength alone, and that is He. That's the beautiful thing about it. It is a place of defense for weak, defeated people who have found in Him an answer to their needs.

But not only is it the place of defense because God's strength is known there, it is also a place of defense because that is the place where God's superiority is shown. You see, the interesting thing about Mount

Zion and about the church of Jesus Christ is this, that she has been the center of much vilification over the years. Right down through the years, she has been the focal point of much attack.

And if you want to read church history sometime, and I know that sounds a terribly dull subject, but it isn't. It's a very exciting subject, and it's something of which every Christian ought to be familiar to some degree or other. If you want to read some church history, I'll tell you what to do.

Get hold of a good book on church history and just look at the church under attack. It's like Jerusalem with her walls surrounded constantly by armies. When one lot go, the next lot show up.

And when they've had a go at it, the next lot show up. And always there's been constant feuding, there's been constant fighting, there's been constant attack on Jerusalem, and it's exactly the same as far as the church of Jesus Christ is concerned today. Now, what is the attack on the church of Jesus Christ today? Well, it's quite different from the attacks not long ago.

You remember the big attack that the church of Jesus Christ went under not so long ago? Because Dr. Darwin came up with a theory. His theory was a very fascinating theory. It was simply that we had come from monkeys.

And as a result of this, he was able to show how in actual fact, we had started off from nothing and had now arrived at something. And therefore, if the process continued, we, of course, would evolve into absolute perfection eventually. Now, this was absolutely fantastic.

This is what everybody wanted to hear. The lovely thing about it was this, that man had started here and was gradually working his way up here. So the lovely thing about it now was this, who needed a church? Because the church would say, man started up here, fell down here, and if he's ever going to get up here, he needs Jesus Christ to get him from here up to here.

Fantastic, let's get rid of the church. It has been proven unnecessary and everybody was excited. But they made a fundamental error.

They've confused a theory with a fact. Now then, the lovely thing about this is this, there has been constant attack in this particular area. I am not talking about evolution now.

I am talking about evolutionism. Evolution is a scientific theory that is unproven. Evolutionism is a religion that is based on an unproven theory.

When you have an unproven theory, you step back and say, okay, could be. But when you have a religion based on an unproven theory, you say, no way. And one of the great attacks that has been centred on the church of Jesus Christ in recent years is simply this.

An attack of rationalism and naturalism that says there is no necessity for a saviour because man is slowly, gradually improving himself. And as one cynic said, if ever there was a fall, it was a fall upwards. That is the kind of attack we've been under.

That's just a recent one. You can go back through history and you'll find them all along the line. But I'll tell you something.

The lovely thing about it is this. That in the church of Jesus Christ, there's a beautiful situation. And it is this.

It is a place of defence because the God who is in her can cope with every single attack that ever comes her way. That's why I always have a hard time understanding people getting so worried about the attacks on the church of Jesus Christ. Some people are always fighting communists.

Other people are always fighting evolutionists. Other people are fighting this and that and the other because they are so unsure of themselves. And there's only one reason they're unsure of themselves.

They're not really too sure of the God who is their defence. They have a little Zion with paper walls that they're trying to hold up against their mighty, unrushing forces instead of saying, God, it's absolutely fantastic to be in Zion where God is resident, where God is in control, where God is our refuge and God is our strength and He is the one who under no circumstances will ever be defeated. I believe that far too many Christians don't understand the sheer beauty of the church of Jesus Christ because they don't understand the place of defence which is theirs with the living God absolutely, wonderfully adequate in the midst of her.

They would cease being defensive. They would cease being constantly alert to trying to preserve their own position and they would be rather enjoying the fact that God is committed to win ultimately total victory. And He's doing it by controlling her enemies and by confounding her critics.

He always has, He always will. You're on the winning side when you're in the church of Jesus Christ. But then the third thing to notice is this.

Not only is this church beautiful because it is the place of delight and the place of defence, it is also the place of discovery. Now look at verse 8. What a glorious testimony it is to say, As we have heard, so have we seen. That would be a lovely phrase to make your motto for the next year.

And see how often it's true. As we have heard, so have we seen. But where does this happen? Well, it says, As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.

God will establish it forever. In other words, this area of fellowship with the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the body of Christ, with other members of Christ, is a place of unbelievable discoveries. The unbelievable discoveries that people make are simply the discoveries where, for instance, theory becomes reality.

I've heard it. I've heard it. I've heard it.

I've heard it. Everybody says, I've heard it till I'm sick of hearing it. But the wonderful thing is to be able to say, Not only have I heard it, but as I have heard it, so have I seen it.

There's a common theory in the world today that seeing is believing. And fortunately, this is in total contradiction to the biblical principle. The worldly principle is this.

Seeing is believing. The biblical principle is this. Believing is seeing.

Some people say, Except I can see, I will not believe. God says, You idiot. What utter nonsense.

There are so many things you can't see. There are so many things you can't understand. Don't get boosted up in your ego.

You're infinitesimal, man. If I really burst out of heaven and took away the drapes and let you really know all there was to know, your computer would burn up in an instant. Don't say, I won't believe it, except I can see.

Come with humility, man. Come admitting you're infinitesimal in a vast universe. Come before your concept of a glorious God and say, God, my only hope is that in faith I can come before you and ask you as I am able to take it to reveal to me truth.

And I'll do it in the fellowship of your church. I'll do it in the fellowship of your son. I'll do it in the fellowship with other people.

So I'll come to this place and I'll expose myself to eternal truth. And the theory will build up in me. And as I put it into practice, that theory will become reality.

And I'll be able to go away each time you say, As I've heard, so have I seen. That's what's so beautiful about the church of Jesus Christ. It's a continual place of discovery, where you're hearing new things as God reveals them to you, as you're ready to take them.

And as you mix with faith and obedience, the things that you've heard so that the theory becomes reality. You know, one of the reasons that the church is neither beautiful nor exciting to a lot of people is that they never discover anything new. They never develop any.

They never move further. Their soul spiritual experience is rooted in some experience they had 25 years ago. And whenever you ask them to speak about spiritual experience, they either say nothing or reverse hurriedly to that experience 25 years ago.

What does that have to do with a person who, alive in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, alive within the walls of Zion, is able to say, As I have heard, so have I seen. Let me tell you what I heard and discovered yesterday. Let me share with you the things that God has been burning into my life in these days.

Because, you see, that's what's so beautiful about the church of Jesus Christ, a place of discovery, where theory becomes reality, but also a place where theology breeds certainty. We'll read this in verse 8 as well. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts.

God will establish it forever. Now, here's the certainty. When I come into the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ, expose myself to the truth so I hear it and hear it and hear it, do you know what begins to build up inside me? A systematic theology.

Now, I must say in all honesty that some of us here aren't getting any systematic theology because we only show it once a week. And there is no way that you can get a systematic theology, a deep grounding in scripture through showing it once a week. You say, I'm very busy.

That's right. I know you're very busy. And if you're too busy for the Word of God, you're too busy, period.

Something needs to be changed. And the one thing that must not be changed is your exposure to the Word of God. Here is eternal truth.

Here is the basis of existence. This is what makes life make sense. And if you can get by with next to nothing in terms of a systematic theology from the Word of God, you can be absolutely certain of this.

Your life is desperately impoverished. I know that's tough talking, but it's a dangerous situation. If I begin to understand that there is life and reality and truth, then I've got to scrap other things to make absolutely certain my roots are deep in the Word of God.

And when my roots get deep in the Word of God, do you know what's going to happen? I'm going to discover real theology, and this is going to breed real reality, and it's going to produce real certainty, and that will equip me for that outside world to be far more effective than if I'd spent more time out there and less time in here. It's the beautiful thing about the Church of Jesus Christ. A place of constant discovery where theory becomes reality and where theology breeds certainty.

But not only a place of discovery. Fourthly, we discover it's a place of deliberation. Verses 9 through 11.

Look at what he says now. We have thought of thy lovingkindness. We have thought.

I like that. You see, he's just said we have seen and we have heard, now we have thought. Now, some people could hardly be accused of thinking too seriously, too deeply when it comes to spiritual matters.

One thing I find hard to understand, and I say this as a person who's been on both sides of the fence, both in the business world and in the preaching world or the ministry world, whichever you want to call it. One thing I find hard to understand is this. Why it is that a lot of sharp businessmen are as sharp as needles sitting behind their desks, but as dull as ditch water when they sit behind their Bibles.

I can never understand it. I can never understand why it is that you can talk to many a businessman and ask him any abstruse question about his business and he'll have the answer at his fingertips, but you can ask him any elementary thing about his faith and he'll hum and haw and open and shut his mouth like a goldfish. I can never understand it.

I'll tell you the reason for it, but I can never understand it. The reason for it is simply this. He has not taken time out to deliberate on the things of God.

What a beautiful thing it is when in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, you not only discover things constantly, but you deliberate upon them. And as you have heard, so have you seen, so have you thought. And you begin to really get your gear circulating in these areas.

You really begin to think through. I was talking to somebody last night and they were telling me they were having trouble sleeping now, but they weren't worried too much about it because they got up at six o'clock and were able to spend 30 minutes in prayer and Bible meditation before they even started the day. Oh, blessed insomnia would be the response to news like that.

I think perhaps that's what some of us need, some blessed insomnia so that in the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ, we could honestly begin to deliberate on the things that really matter. You could be caught up in things that you're going to leave behind, friend, when you go. If you really want to prepare yourself for life and for eternity, you in the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ, deliberate on eternal issues.

In the fellowship of Zion, in the temple of the living God, we have thought of thy lovingkindness. What kind of thing do you think about? Well, there's four things here that obviously jump right out of the text. We have deliberated on God's lovingkindness, verse 9. God's lovingkindness means his kindness that comes through loving.

You know, that's kind of obvious, isn't it? His sheer kindness that comes through loving. Have you ever had the embarrassing situation where you haven't liked somebody and they've just insisted on being kind to you? One part of Jill's testimony that I've heard many times and never ceases to touch me is where she tells about lying in the hospital bed ill and no one's sure what was wrong with her. And then the girl in the bed to her on one side dies and someone lets it slip that they think that Jill has the same disease that this girl dies from.

And then the girl on the other side who's a Christian girl who was suffering unbelievable abuse from Jill because Jill thought it was the funniest thing that she'd read her Bible and pray in bed and all this sort of thing. And I remember over and over again hearing Jill say this, but the thing that really bugged me about that girl was this, that the more rude I was to her, the more loving she was in response. And there's nothing quite designed to break you up more than somebody insisting on being loving and kind towards you the more you insist on being antagonistic and ornery towards them.

Now, what we really need to do, folks, is simply this. In the fellowship of the Church of Jesus Christ, we're going to have to take time out to think on the loving kindness of our God. And that breaks you up.

Just stop and think. Just stop and ponder. Get away in a quiet corner of your house.

Switch off your TV. Get up into your bedroom. Get on your knees.

Open your Bible. And in part of the fellowship of a universal praise to the living God, say, Oh God, quieten my mind. Focus my attention and let me come alight with the deliberation of your loving kindness.

Not only your loving kindness, Lord, but your faithfulness and your righteousness and your carefulness. All the things in verses 9 to 11. But then, fifthly, it's a place of declaration.

This is what's so beautiful about Zion, what's so beautiful about the Church of Jesus Christ. For if you read very carefully in verse 12 and 13, this is what it says. Walk about Zion.

Go round about her. Tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks.

Consider her palaces. To what end? Well, here it is. That you may tell it to the generation following.

You know, you can talk to the Jewish people and, boy, are they proud of Jerusalem. Do you remember the Six-Day War when they were able to burst through into what had been Arab-held territory in Jordan? They were able to get through to what we call the Wailing Wall, what they call the Western Wall, the remnant of Solomon's Temple, the basis of the great platform on which the Temple was built, that sacred place to the Jewish people. Do you remember how excited they were to get there and how the army rushed there and suddenly thousands of men, congregated on the place, prostrated themselves before it, kissing the wall so excited? You know why? They had never seen it.

None of them had ever seen it. They had never been allowed to go there, but they knew exactly where they were going and they knew exactly they wanted to go there. Why? I mean, if none of them had ever seen it, why were they so excited to get there? Very simply, previous generations right down through Jewish history had done what God had told them to do.

Walk around Zion. Go around about her. Tell the towers.

Mark their bulwarks. Consider her palaces. And they had told it to their generations so that coming generations knew what they were looking for.

Do you know the fellowship of Jesus Christ is? It's a fellowship of people who are so excited about Jesus Christ and so consistent in their concern for Jesus Christ that they have taken time out from personal experience to know what they're going to tell. And not only from personal experience, but also from painstaking examination. I wish we had time painstakingly to examine these verses.

Now look what it says. Walk about Zion. In other words, take a guided tour of the church of Jesus Christ and find out what it is.

Walk about it. Then go around about her. Step back for a minute and go right round every inch of the church of Jesus Christ as it appears from outside.

You've walked around inside, now walk around outside. Then tell the towers. The word tell here is in the sense that we have a teller in a bank, a count.

Count the towers. Oh boy, here's a strong point and here's a strong point and here's a strong point. Do you know what the towers of the church of Jesus Christ are? The basic fundamental theological facts that are eternal truth.

Tell the towers. I wonder if I were to come down to you now and say, Hey, stand up and tell me a tower. Stand up and tell me what you know because you know what to tell.

You've taken time out carefully, personally, painstakingly to examine and to experience the truths of the living God. Well, you see, the important thing about it is this, that you should be doing this in the context of the church of Jesus Christ to such a degree that you are teaching future generations. You know, I'm very interested in young people.

I'm so interested in young people that I wish I could spend a lot more time with them because I used to spend all my time with them. I'm very concerned about the young people in our place and there are few things that delight me more than to hear that 300 young people met here all day Friday. Few things delight me more than this.

This is exciting. This is thrilling. But you know what I've discovered in churches throughout America? I have discovered that there are people who are suffering under a severe misapprehension and the severe misapprehension is this, they seem to think that it is the church youth director's responsibility to raise the kids in the fear and the admonition of the Lord and that is wrong.

I have been in many churches where the youth director has been driven to an early grave because parents have been insisting that he comes up with something new to entertain a lot of bored kids. And do you know why those kids are bored and do you know why they need to be entertained? Because their parents have fallen down on the job and did not raise them in the fear and the admonition of the Lord. The primary responsibility for producing young saints is not the youth director and it is not the pastors, it is the parents.

That's why it says that you walk around Zion and you go round about her and you tell the towers and you mark the bulwarks and you consider the palaces so that you can tell it to your future generations. I'm all for being caught up in it. I'm all for being part of it.

But I'm also very much aware of this, that it is impossible for the pastor or the youth director to undo in one month what parents have managed to do in 18 years in some of their kids. And I believe the Church of Jesus Christ should be producing people who know that it is their place in this fellowship to declare that which they have discovered because they have taken time out to deliberate upon it. But not only is it a place of declaration, it's also a place of decision.

This Church of Jesus Christ is a place of decision because verse 14a says this, this God, this King, this Lord, this wonderful Savior, this God is our God. You know, there are a lot of people outside Jerusalem, outside Zion who could look with awe and wonder and reverence and fear of this God, but they could never say this God is our God. Do you know what they have to say? That God is their God.

I guess we never open our doors without some people coming in who can't say this God is my God. I guess we never open our doors without some people coming in and saying that God is their God, but it's not my God. That's one of the beautiful things about the Church of Jesus Christ.

It's a place of decision. It's a place where people can be caught up with the warmth of the fellowship, caught up with the reality of the Word, caught up with the sense of purpose, caught up with the idea of the dynamic, caught up with what it really means to be part of God's plan. And they're so excited about the whole thing, they say, that God that is your God, I want that God to be my God.

I'm going to make a decision. I'm going to repent of my sin. I'm going to come to the cross of Jesus Christ.

I'm going to ask for forgiveness and I'm going to install this King who has a throne in heaven and a throne in Jerusalem. I'm going to install him with a throne in my life as well. This God shall be my God forever and forever.

This is the exciting thing about the Church of Jesus Christ. Never stagnates, never gets dull, never gets boring, always fresh and alive and growing. Why? Because when you've got a place of declaration, you've always got a place of decision.

For the clear declaration of the truth of the living God in the fellowship of the Church of Jesus Christ demands decision. It will be that some of us here this morning are standing outside Zion and we're saying that God is their God, but that God isn't my God. I'll tell you what to do.

Write down on a piece of paper 20 good reasons why that God is not your God. And if you can't come up with 20 good reasons why that God isn't your God, reconsider quick. And the final thing that I'd like you to notice is that the Church of Jesus Christ, which is so beautiful, is a place of destiny.

He will be our guide even unto death. But of course, before that, He said that this God is our God forever and ever. The delightful thing about the Church of Jesus Christ is this.

In the fellowship of Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of His people, decisions are made that resolve the eternal destiny of never dying souls. And that's why we're here. We're here to glorify Him.

We're here to praise Him. We're here to honour Him. We're here to be caught up in His purposes.

We're here to deliberate upon Him. And we're here to declare Him so that people can decide for Him and as a result have their destiny utterly and completely in Him.

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