

## PSALM 122: A SONG OF PRAISE AND PRAYER

[West Leigh Baptist Church 26 November 2011]

### ***Congratulations on your splendid building project!***

What you have achieved is truly wonderful.

I have little doubt that in the years to come God will honour all the sacrifices of time, effort and money this new building represents

I say that as one who knows first-hand what it is to redevelop a building just over ten years ago, the church of which I am minister at Chelmsford we spent almost £2 million on redeveloping our church – and we have been amazingly blessed as a result. Our building proved a key to the spiritual renewal of the church's life – and as a result in the past 10 years we have grown substantially

The fact is that ***buildings do matter***.

Some people can be amazingly negative about a building project

*It's wrong, they say, for Christians to spend money on themselves.*

*If you've got money, you should give it to the poor.*

But, as you are no doubt aware, that criticism is fundamentally flawed.

You have not spent the money on "yourselves" - rather you have invested money in mission, and in particular in a mission facility appropriate to world today.

The fact is that people's expectations have changed.

The cinemas discovered that some years ago. They realised if they were to attract people to see their films, then it wasn't simply a matter of having good films to show. It was also a matter of having comfortable seats in which to watch the films.

So they knocked down their old 'flea pits' and built new cinemas instead, with the result that people now go to the cinema again. .

The parallel with church is clear. People are not prepared to put up with hard, uncomfortable pews, or with ill-heated and draughty buildings.

What was good enough for their grand-parents, is no longer good enough for them.

Just as the cinemas needed to upgrade their facilities to attract a new cinema-going public, so we churches, if we want to attract a new church-going public, must do the same.

Some critics have been more radical and questioned whether we need a building at all.

After all, Christians didn't have buildings until around 200 AD.

But the fact is that you can't serve the community if you simply rent a school building on a Sunday. ***Holistic mission requires buildings.***

A decent building is a great investment in mission.

I believe that you will never regret the money you have spent for the sake of Jesus.

Well, enough of generalities.

I have been asked to preach – albeit preach briefly.

So the question arises: what does God want me to say to you this afternoon?

As I pondered on this question, my mind went to ***Psalm 122***.

A psalm of praise & prayer, originally sung by Jewish pilgrims as they entered Jerusalem at festival time, it seems to me an eminently suitable psalm for today

Let me read it to you in the GNB:

## 1. TODAY WE HAVE REASON TO PRAISE GOD

The psalm begins on a note of praise:

**“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the Lord’s house’  
And now we are here, standing inside the gates of Jerusalem”**

Peterson: *“When they said, ‘Let’s go to the house of God’, my heart leaped for joy. And now we’re here, oh Jerusalem, inside Jerusalem’s walls!”*

Yes - **NOW** at last - **we are here!**

Yes, how glad you all must feel - how full of joy you all must be

After all the planning, all the talking, all the giving, all the building, **now** at last, our new church premises are ready for use.

Every Sunday we Christians feel glad to have the opportunity to worship God.

But today you, the members and friends of West Leigh Baptist Church, must feel a special gladness, special joy - for here you are, in this new suite of premises, praising God.

In every sense of the word, it is a wonderful day.

Like the pilgrims, we are overwhelmed by the beauty of what we see.

◆ The pilgrims of old saw **“a city restored in beautiful order & harmony”**.

◆ Today we see the old church premises totally transformed, ***renewed in beautiful order & harmony***. What a magnificent job the architects & builders have done.

In the words of Peterson, today we see this church **“well-built... as a place for worship”**.

For the pilgrims Jerusalem was **“where the tribes [i.e. the people of God] come... to give thanks to the Lord”** (v4).

This new church is also a place where people will come to give thanks to God – they will come to give thanks first & foremost for Jesus.

But surely today we must also give thanks for the provision of this magnificent mission facility - and for the generosity of his people, who have made this possible.

Today we have reason to thank God

And so we say, ‘Thank you God for this amazing redevelopment’.

## 2. TODAY WE HAVE REASON TO PRAY TO GOD

From praise the psalmist turns to prayer. He says: **“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem”** (v6)

In turn, let me encourage you too to pray for God’s peace.

In the first place, pray for God to bless this church with **peace**.

I have no idea what has led up to the redevelopment of this building.

What I do know is that when in Chelmsford we redeveloped our building, there were some people who were very unhappy – although 80% were in favour, some 20% were not – and the 20% made their feelings known. Our church went through a very difficult period. There was much pain – there were many tears.

But thank God, tears of pain became tears of joy. Yes, God answered our prayers for peace: and what had been a very dysfunctional church, became a very united, loving church

The fact is that where two or three are gathered together, from time to time there are bound to be disagreements.

I sense that in the recent life of this church there has not always been peace.

Whether or not that has been linked to the building I don't know.

But what I do know is that we need to pray for God's peace to keep guard over the hearts and minds of all.

As we do so, remember, that for a Jew "**peace**" means far more than cessation from warfare - when Jews greet one another with the words "*Shalom, shalom*" they are wishing one another God's very best.

Yes, God, bless this church with peace – bless this church abundantly

But the Psalmist asks us to pray for more than peace.

The Psalm goes on: "**May there be peace inside your walls & safety in your palaces**" (v7). Significantly the word for "**safety**" is also the word for "*salvation*".

So let me encourage you to pray not only for **peace**, but also for "*salvation*" to be experienced inside the walls of this church.

Indeed, the Psalmist says: "**For the sake of my relatives & friends I say, "Peace be with you"**" (v8). Other versions read: "*Salvation be within you*".

Pray that God will bless not only the church, but also our relatives & our friends – and that God will bless them above all in bringing them to himself.

Yes, God, bless this church with salvation – may many discover your love for us all in Jesus.

Here then are two reasons to pray to God today.

### 3. TODAY WE HAVE REASON TO REDEDICATE OURSELVES TO GOD

According to the GNB the Psalmist ends: "**For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I pray for your prosperity**" (v9) [similarly REB].

It is possible, however, that instead of ending with prayer, the Psalmist ends on a note of dedication.

- ◆ NRSV: "*I will seek your good*";
- ◆ Peterson: "*I'll do my very best for you*"

Yes today, we have reason to rededicate ourselves to God.

For although today is the end of the building project, it is also just the beginning of a new stage in the life of this church.

Over the years West Leigh has served the community – but as a result of the new building there will be a host of further opportunities.

But you will only be able to take advantage of those opportunities, as people give of their time and energy to God.

The effectiveness of this church will be dependent upon the commitment of its volunteers.

In Chelmsford we have been blessed with a small army of volunteers, with a result that we are able to run a seven day a week church – open for business from 8.30 in the morning to 10

o'clock at night.

The volunteers come in all shapes and sizes.

I think of a civil engineer who every Tuesday comes in his lunchtime to clean the windows.

I think of a squad of six retired people who every Monday morning are at church by 7 o'clock to clean the toilets, Hoover the carpets, and generally ensure that the church is ready for business by 8.30

I think of think of the 20 or so people who run our mental health clubs, 52 weeks a year – there is never a week when we these clubs do not run

And so I could go on – naming one activity after another.

All dependent upon committed volunteers

Yes, we have two paid staff in the church centre – without the dedication of the volunteers there would be no church centre.

And what is true of Chelmsford will be true of West Leigh.

This church would not have survived without dedicated volunteers.

But today with the opening of these new premises you, the members and friends of West Leigh, have an opportunity to rededicate yourselves

For this splendid building will only reach its true potential as you all play your part, seeking to do your very best for God & for his kingdom.

God bless you in the task that is yours!