

The Most Beautiful Place on Earth

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Psalms

By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 48. This first Sunday of the new year, 2019, I want to begin a series of messages that will help us to have a right view of something that's very precious to God, that is, the church. You know, we mentioned a while back that we were going to be focusing in January on praying about, well, this fall into January, praying about the Lord's direction for the future of this church. We talked about the possibility of expanding our parking lot. Today was a nice day, a sunny day for a change to come to church and park in the grass. Praise the Lord. It seems like we haven't had one of those in a long time. But we need to have more parking; we need to in different areas need more room, our nurseries. So we're praying for wisdom about what to do with that and we've asked you to pray. When we expand, we want to do it in accordance with the will of God, whatever he wants us to do. So what we are building first and foremost, though, what we've said and we'll say again and this is part of the reason for this series is, that what we're building when we gather together is not a building, it's not bricks and mortar, the building of God is the people of God. That is what is precious to him. It is the spiritual building of which you, as Peter says in 1 Peter 2, if you're a believer, if you have repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ and been born again, then you are a living stone and we as a church, as a local expression of this, are living stones being built together into a temple, a house for God to dwell in, and that's what must always be foremost when we think of buildings. That's the building we're building and so the buildings themselves are just a facilitating of that.

This is something that has become clear to me as a pastor, it's one of the ironies of my ministry is I really have grown to have a higher and higher view of the church the longer and longer I'm in the word. When I first came into ministry, I had been growing up in churches where at times it seemed that there was like guilt motivation and building programs were seemed to be a little bit more about the building and about the excitement and the earthly kind of thing, and so also just the pressure to come, just be there because you've got to be there, and it wasn't spiritually tied together. So I came into the pastorate, even, and it's really kind of odd for a pastor to have a low view of the church but I did. I mean, you know, the pastor has an interest in obviously everybody having a high view of the church. If nobody has a high view of the church, nobody comes to church. Where there is no church, there is no need for a pastor. But I had a low view, relatively speaking, and the more that I read the New Testament, what's happened is God has been

recalibrating my thinking to be like his thinking and what we're going to see today is some doctrine throughout the Scriptures, we're going to start in Psalm 48 and we're going to move throughout the Scriptures, that help us to have a higher view of the church.

By nature, our sin nature messes up the way we see things. We're conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, we come into the world with lots of resistance to the way things really are. We don't see things as they are. We're blind, the Scripture teaches us. We're dead in our trespasses and sins and so we have a low view of God. Unbelievers tend to think of God as not that far above us. They'll say things like, "The man upstairs," or something like that where the God the Bible talks about is a God who is exalted far above our ability to even imagine. His greatness is unsearchable. We tend to have a low view of Scripture. We'll take some and leave some. We don't put the Bible in its right place and we tend to have a low view of the church.

I was reading a book this week about this issue and this pastor was saying that many people have said, "Jesus, yes. The church, no. Don't need the church. I'm my own church." Well, that is a viewpoint that is completely out of step with the New Testament. You cannot find that kind of a mindset there. You can't find it in the Bible. We're going to see today that the Old Testament is even anticipating the high view of the church that Jesus has and demonstrates in the New Testament.

So what we're looking at is a proper view of the church, a biblical view of the church, but the title of the message this morning is "The Most Beautiful Place on Earth." The most beautiful place on earth, and our text that we're going to use as a point of departure is Psalm 48:1-3. We're going to be moving around through the Scriptures, though. It will be a little different than a normal Sunday where we exposit one passage. We're going to start here and then we're going to move around to show this theme, how this thread runs through the Scriptures.

The most beautiful place on earth. We had a presentation this morning, we were reminded earlier when Sybrandt shared about our mission trip to South Africa, 15 folks from our church went over and helped out in some biblical counseling conferences that they were having there in Pretoria and Cape Town, and one of the things that I came away with was the beauty of South Africa. It's a beautiful place and Cape Town, particularly, is an extraordinarily beautiful place. If you have the opportunity to go, you should go. I would just recommend not swimming there. We had some of our folks wanted to swim there and I'm like, and I was talking to a pastor friend who had had, he actually had experienced this thing where he was walking down, he walked every day to the beach at the same place and he would see this lady and say hello, you know, it was like several people, regular walkers, and one day he goes for his walk, comes back and she's been eaten by a shark. They were telling me now they have technology that can see how many great whites there are in the area around Cape Town, 300 great white sharks in the vicinity of Cape Town. That says to me that's not a place to go swimming, but anyway, you do as you want to.

So it's a beautiful place, though. That's why the sharks go, I guess, they love the view of the area too. But I was thinking about this, this week, what is the most beautiful place on earth? Some of you have been places that you would say, "Well, this has got to be up there." The feeling of seeing the Grand Canyon or cities like maybe Florence, Rome, some would say Paris, Amsterdam, Prague, Bangkok, Lucerne, Budapest, Kiev in the Ukraine, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Honolulu, Vancouver. We could go on and on and on. In fact, I looked online at some lists, you know, 40 of the most beautiful cities, 20, 10. Cape Town tended to be in a lot of those lists, actually, in the top 10 or 15. But one city that was not there is a city that God says is the most beautiful city on earth and we're going to read a passage about it right here.

Psalm 48:1-3,

1 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain. 2 Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion in the far north, The city of the great King. 3 God, in her palaces, Has made Himself known as a stronghold.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how we thank You for Your word and we thank You, Lord, that the interest of your word gives light and we ask that today in Your light we might see light; that You by Your Spirit might work in every heart and accomplish the purpose of Your word in each one. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The most beautiful place on earth. What I want to suggest to you is that the most beautiful place on earth today, I'm going to show you the connection between what we just read. The most beautiful city on earth at the time David wrote these words in Psalm 48, or the sons of Korah wrote these words in Psalm 48 was Jerusalem. That's because God saw Jerusalem as the most beautiful place on earth but the most beautiful place on earth today, the most beautiful place that you could be anywhere on the earth is with the gathered people of God in the local expression of the church.

Now that's pretty radical, isn't it? It doesn't seem like that. At first glance certainly you don't think to yourself, "I can't wait to see the views I'm going to see today." Although today with a slide show in Sunday morning Bible study, you got to see some of those views, but normally you don't think about that. In fact, a lot of times the church feels very mundane, very pedestrian. C. S. Lewis talks about that in his book "The Screwtape Letters" where he is describing the way, imagining a demon counseling another demon how to confuse this young man that he's assigned to. It's all speculative but there is some wisdom in it, and he talks about how, he says, "One of the great allies you're going to have in deceiving this guy," who is apparently getting interested in things of God and comes to faith, he says, "One of our greatest allies," now this is a demon talking to a demon remember, "One of our greatest allies," the demons', "is the church." He says, "Not the church as you and I see her," not the church as the demons themselves see the church. No, "The church as we see it is terrible as an army with banners rooted in

eternity. That is a vision which causes even our greatest tempters to tremble, but the church as he sees her," as the man sees her. He can't see the reality of the glory of the church, the glory of the gathered people of God who are not glorious because of anything in ourselves, we are glorious because God has done something in us and is working in us and is in us. But the reality, if we could see it, would stagger us, and if we stay in the Scriptures more and more, we'll have a greater appreciation for that and we'll have eyes that are more attuned to see, that are adjusted to see the wonder of what God is doing.

Now I want to show you this connection so my thesis basically is the most beautiful place on earth is Providence Church, is Linwood Baptist Church in Pretoria, it's wherever true believers gather around the word of God to praise the name of Jesus Christ. I want to show you this because God teaches us this in the Old Testament by teaching us, first of all, that Jerusalem is the most beautiful place on the earth to him in this passage. Verse 2, Psalm 48, "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion." Mount Zion is a term for Jerusalem. It is the place that God has chosen for himself.

Now just to show you this theme, look over, in my Bible I only have to turn a page, Psalm 50:1-2. We see the same theme. Psalm 50:1, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting," listen to this next word, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth." Zion is the perfection of beauty. Jerusalem is the perfection of beauty to God. How can that be? It doesn't seem that way. It doesn't appear that way. In fact, I want you to turn over to Psalm 68 and to see that even clearly the Lord understands this and tells us even in his word that it doesn't look like that. Psalm 68:15-17, another passage. We could go through passage after passage after passage that talks of the beauty of Jerusalem and the place where God dwells. But anyway, this one more I want to look at right now to establish this point. In verse 15, the Psalmist points out the glorious mountains that are spread throughout that area north of Palestine, and he speaks of them and they are some mountains that are snow covered mountains, that are great awesome mountains, and Jerusalem, Mount Zion, is a relatively small mountain. That's the fact of the topography but that's not the fact of the real spiritual reality.

Look what he says in verses 15 to 17. "A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan," that's one of the great glorious mountains, "A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan. Why do you look with envy, O mountains with many peaks, At the mountain which God has desired for His abode? Surely the LORD will dwell there forever." He says the other mountains look with envy on Jerusalem. It's like the most attractive people looking at someone that's not that attractive apparently with envy saying, "She is beautiful." Jerusalem stands out above all the other cities of the world.

The mountain of Jerusalem stands out above all the mountains of the world. Now how can we make sense of that? Well, it has told us there in even that passage we just read. "Surely the LORD will dwell there forever." It's "the mountain which God has desired for His abode," Psalm 68:16, and that's exactly what we saw in Psalm 50, God shines forth out of Zion. It's the city of our God, Psalm 48:1. God says that Jerusalem is the most beautiful place on earth because Jerusalem is the place where you can see God, at that

time you could see the glory of God the most clearly of any place on earth and the difference was as night is to day. Jerusalem is the place where you can see the glory of God.

Now what happens as you go throughout the rest of the Bible is we see that Jerusalem and the place where God dwells was a type for the church, that is, God was teaching us in this typology, there are some types in the Bible that are clear types, things like the lamb that was slain is a type of Jesus, you see; the Passover lamb was a type of the antitype, the true reality. The shadow is the type versus the substance which comes after. The Passover lamb was a shadow, Jesus is the substance. In the same way, Jerusalem was a shadow, the church is the substance, the people of God.

You see this in a final way in Revelation 21, the very end of the Bible when God's purposes have come to completion because he tells us who Jerusalem is, the new Jerusalem, the substantial Jerusalem, the true Jerusalem. This is Revelation 21:1, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'" The bride is the church. The bride is Jerusalem. The believers, every true believer that has come to saving faith in Christ is a part of this bride and is a part of Jerusalem, the true Jerusalem, and the ultimate fulfillment happens in heaven, but in the meantime, in the meantime the church, this is the place, this is the one place on earth that you can come and see the glory of God with the greatest clarity and it's the difference between night and day.

Now it's true we carry the Spirit with us and so we have the Spirit with us and we have the word with us, and so God can show his glory, but there's something I'm going to show you from the New Testament, how the place of the church in God's eyes today is analogous to the way he talked about Jerusalem and that ought to change the way you and I think about the church. We ought to delight in the church the way he does. Our brothers and sisters are not just our brothers and sisters, they are the apple of God's eye and when we come to the church, we have the opportunity to see his glory with greatest clarity, see his power manifest, set on display, and if we have that right view, it will change the way that we treat one another, begin to value each other in a way that is commensurate with how God values us, and this is the church which he purchased with his own blood.

Now in saying that, I would suggest that there are times when you have seen the beauty of the church and you've been moved by it and you've been stirred by it, something like seeing a beautiful sunset in an incredible vista, like looking off of Table Mountain in Cape Town, but you know, here I've had this thought, you go somewhere and you're like, "You can't believe this, the scenery is incredible," but you stay there a little while and people come out of their house, they close their door and they walk to their car and they don't stop and look at that mountain back there, they don't every time they come out and say, "Wow!" What happens? It's familiarity. They get used to it. It's no big deal anymore

and I would suggest that's something that happens to believers. When you are truly saved, you come into this thing and there's this wowness about it, and yet because you can't see as you would like to see and as I mentioned earlier from C. S. Lewis, we can see the warts, we can see the weakness, and we can be distracted by the external things and miss the beauty but the reality is that in the same way that Mount Zion doesn't look that impressive next to the mountains of Bashan with earthly eyes, when you have on spiritual eyes, it towers above it in glory.

Now two points I want us to consider our thoughts around, gather our thoughts around. These are basically the reasons that the church is the most beautiful place on earth. Every true church this is true of. They're all a work in progress yet this is true. If the word of God is being truly taught and the people of God, the people that gather there truly have come to a saving relationship with Christ, this is true. So two reasons the church is the most beautiful place on earth: the local church is the place where God's glory is seen the clearest. That's the first point, the local church is the place where God's glory is seen the clearest.

The reason that Jerusalem is beautiful is because God is there and God is beautiful. Psalm 27:4, David said, "One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life." He wants to dwell in the house of the Lord every day of his life. Why? "To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple." Psalm 27:4. God is the most beautiful, the most glorious, the most wonderful.

Jonathan Edwards, I shared this quote not too long ago but it was one that just needs to be read again. In speaking of the beauty of God, he says, listen, that all the wonderful things that we enjoy in life, including the views that we can talk about in all those different cities that I mentioned, you know, the mountains, all of those things are God's handiwork, right? So we see him. Every good thing we experience is a picture of the goodness and beauty and glory of God and so Edwards writes this, "To go to heaven to fully enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. It's better than fathers and mothers. It's better than husbands and wives or children. It's better than the company of any or all earthly friends. These things are but shadows, the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams but God is the sun. These are but streams but God is the fountain. These are but drops but God is the ocean."

So to be in the presence of God, that's what we want. What is it that makes the church, what is it that made Jerusalem so beautiful? What is it that makes the church so beautiful? This is the place where God dwells and he makes this clear in the New Testament it's not just that we individually are our own church. I mean, he does dwell in you. If you've been born again, God dwells in you and your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit but, you know, when the Bible talks about you being a temple of the Holy Spirit, overwhelmingly the preponderance, there is only one verse that talks about you individually being a temple of the Holy Spirit and that's 1 Corinthians 6:18, but you'll see what it normally says is you are, you plural, you are, you all is what I meant to say. How did I mess that up? Y'all. And normally in the Greek that's the verb. It says like Colossians 3:5, "Christ

in you the hope of glory." Christ in y'all, the hope of glory. Christ in you, plural, gathered together, the hope of glory.

Christ dwells in you. Look at some verses with me. 1 Corinthians 3. I mentioned 1 Corinthians 6 does speak of the body of a believer being a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is true absolutely, but the greater emphasis is on the corporate nature of our fellowship and Christ's presence with us.

1 Corinthians 3:16, this is where the y-o-u in English is really y'all in Greek. You didn't know that Greek word but that's...it's not really. Anyway. Alright. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" You, plural. He's talking to the whole group. "Do you not know that you," the local believers gathered around the word of God in Corinth, the local believers gathered here at Providence, the local believers that gathered six or so hours ago at Linwood Baptist Church in Pretoria, South Africa, "Do you not know that you are a temple of [the living] God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

Turn over to 2 Corinthians 6:16, "what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God.'" We, plural, are the temple of God.

You can see this even more clearly, I'll just give you some passages to look at. Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:1-10. What you see there is that Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are being built into a spiritual house, a temple; that we all are part of that temple. So there's a local temple of God everywhere believers gather. That's a local temple of God and they come together and God dwells among them. 1 Peter 2 says the same thing, you're a living stone, that's the passage I mentioned earlier. We're all living stones being fashioned into a dwelling for God.

But what makes the dwelling here the most beautiful place on earth is not anything in us. No, it's a reflected beauty. We reflect the beauty of the one who is altogether beautiful, altogether lovely. It's like Moses, remember when Moses came down from the mountain and his face shone with the brilliance of the glory of God and it was shining? There was nothing in Moses but he had been in the presence of the glory of God and that glory was reflecting off of him. That's what makes this place so beautiful is the glory of God is reflecting, it's reflecting off of us. It's not inherently ours. Now he's here and so we see him but as you see the person around you, you see a reflected glory because wherever God dwells, that is where beauty is, that's where glory is.

I want to mention some passages that I'm going to tell you in summary for the sake of time. If you were to look at Exodus 40, the way God helps us understand this, in the Old Testament the way that you see the Lord communicating is he is teaching us basic things through pictures and then they become clearer in the New Testament when Jesus comes. It's kind of like the way you teach your child anything, you have to start with the little things, 2+2. If you have two apples and you have two more apples, how many apples have you got? You don't start off with algebraic equations, you start off with 2+2. Well,

the Bible does that and so as we see it walked through, then it becomes clearer, the beauty and fullness becomes clearer. What you see is wherever the presence of God, there is glory and beauty and so God has willed to make his glory and his beauty known in a certain place.

This is what we begin to see happening through the Old Testament and the first place God makes his glory and beauty known in a fallen world after sin, is in the tabernacle. In Exodus 40:33-35, you'll read the tabernacle was basically a very nice portable building that the Israelites would set up and God's glory would dwell in it. When they would travel, they would take the tent down, the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud, the pillar of glory would go ahead of them, then they would set up the tabernacle and the glory would fill the tabernacle. In fact, the first time it filled the tabernacle that way was after Moses finished the work and you read this in Exodus 40:33-35. God gave him all these specific rules about what to do with the tabernacle, exactly how it needed to be made because God is holy and it must be according to his specifications and it says Moses finished the work and the next thing it says, when he finished the work the cloud of glory filled the tabernacle, and the glory was so great that no one could go in. The priests could not approach the tabernacle but they saw the visible manifestation of the glory of God.

He finished the work. Skip ahead to when God is teaching us more, he makes the tabernacle a permanent dwelling, where? In Jerusalem. That's what made Jerusalem so beautiful was God chose to make that tabernacle no longer a portable dwelling, he wanted to make it a permanent dwelling and so Solomon builds the temple. You can read about this in 1 Kings 7 and the beginning of chapter 8. In 7:51 you'll read Solomon finished the work, and the next thing you know the glory fills the temple.

So now if you want to see the glory of God, you have to go to Jerusalem to the temple and that's essentially what happened in Revelation 21, when the work is finished at the end, when Jesus has done everything necessary to defeat his enemies, then the glory will come and dwell in the temple when Jesus finishes the work. Now I would suggest to you that something like that is happening in Acts 1 and 2. In Acts 1:8, Jesus gives final instructions to the disciples and he ascends to heaven and he sits down at the right hand of God. His work is finished. What's his work? His work was to take people from every tribe and tongue and kindred and bring them into a temple, to build the temple. He's done everything necessary. He's finished his work just like Moses did, just like Solomon did, and what happens? He says, "Wait in Jerusalem," and what happens? The Holy Spirit comes and fills the temple. The glory comes down. That's what you read in Acts 2, the glory of God filling the temple.

Now from that day until Jesus comes back, the glory fills the temple every time people gather around the name of Jesus Christ. His glory is here. We may miss it. We may not see it but it's here. So this, to God, is Jerusalem, the beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth, and it's because he dwells here. His glory is seen here. His character is on display here. Where else can you go and see the love of God as clearly as you can at the church? Where else can you go and see the joy of God as clearly as you can with the people of God? Where else can you go and see peace, and patience, and kindness, and

goodness, and gentleness, and faithfulness, and self-control? Supernatural qualities, where can you see those anywhere close like you can see them with the gathering of the people of God?

That's God's plan. Jesus wants to show and so when people come in and they stay and they watch us relate, if we're walking with the Lord and we're focused on who he is and what we are, we're called to be this wonderful awesome thing, the church, that Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." If we are seeking to walk in his Spirit and seeking him and trying to be obedient to him, then when we come together we have opportunity to display his glorious love. I mean, where else can you find people who really offend one another, because we do that, don't we, because the reality is we are still sinners, that's the amazing thing. I mean, we're going to hurt one another. We're going to step on each other's toes but God in us helps us to actually forgive, truly forgive. This is a place where people have experienced all kinds of betrayal in marriages, in families, in relationships, and yet here are people that have been reconciled. Who can say, "I love my spouse who was unfaithful to me more than I did before he was unfaithful. I don't know how that is except that Jesus has done something. I now know what love is. I didn't know that before and as horrible as it was to go through that, I wouldn't change a thing because I've come to see God." Or where else can you go and find people who have no earthly reason to be happy and yet their hearts are overflowing with joy and their joy is rooted in truth. It's not some kind of Pollyanna sort of pretend joy. No, it's the joy of knowing that even in your afflictions, your Father is governing everything to a perfect and wonderful end.

That's joy. That's peace. There's no need to fret and we're all struggling for those things, aren't we? We find ourselves forgetting and we lose our joy, we lose our peace, we lose our patience but we gather together with God in our midst so that we can remember and encourage one another, and as time goes on, what happens is we together are looking more and more like Jesus and our Father is taking increasing and amazing delight in us. Not because of anything in us, but because of who he is and what he's doing.

The church is the most beautiful place on earth because it's the place where God's glory is seen and the church is the most beautiful place on earth, second point, because it's where God's power is most clearly displayed or set on display. It's displayed and set on display both. One of the things that made Jerusalem so beautiful to God was that he was going to do something extraordinary there. That was the place where heaven met earth in Jerusalem. Redemption came down from heaven to the earth at Jerusalem. That's the touch point. It was first seen in the reign of David in a typological way. David, the city of David, Jerusalem, the great king. He was a great king. It was seen in Solomon but yet those were just types, the substance was when Jerusalem was the place.

Now think about this, the whole globe, all the places that there are. Jerusalem was the place where a young couple brought a 40-day old infant boy to the temple in obedience to the law. They bring him into the temple and there was Anna and Simeon and they recognized him. He didn't look anything special, just the same way as Jerusalem doesn't look that special. This baby didn't look that special just looking at him if you just had

earthly eyes, but God had opened their eyes to see spiritually and they recognized, "This is the Messiah. This is the one." And Jerusalem is the place that same young boy would come back to each year for the festivals, and we were told about one when he was 12 years old when he came to Jerusalem, remember when he was confounding the teachers of the law in the temple at 12 years old? And Jerusalem was the place where that same little boy now grown up to a man, at 30 years old walked into the courts of the temple and put together a scourge and cleansed the temple and said, "This is My Father's house and you've made it a den of robbers." And they said to him, the rulers and the chief priests said to him, "By what authority do you do this? How can you be so presumptuous to do this?" And he said, "I tell you by what authority I do this, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it." And they didn't know he was talking about the temple of his body. You see, the temple has been replaced, now the temple of God is in the man, Christ Jesus, but there it is in Jerusalem and Jerusalem is the place where the greatest battle that the world has ever seen, the most glorious victory, the most momentous triumph happened in Jerusalem just outside the gate at Calvary where Jesus shed his blood, where he bore the sins of everyone who would ever believe and where he took away Satan, he triumphed over Satan, as Paul says in Colossians 3, he made a public spectacle of Satan and his spiritual enemies.

That's the place. It's like I've been to Gettysburg, I've been to a number of different places, battlegrounds, and Gettysburg is awesome. If you haven't had the opportunity to go, I encourage you if you're in Pennsylvania to go, to be there on that hallowed ground. You see, that's where the Civil War turned. That's where Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address. It makes it a special place. It's not just like every other green pasture in Southern Pennsylvania and that's why Jerusalem is so beautiful, because Jerusalem is the place of the greatest victory that the world has ever seen. It's the place where Jesus destroyed the power of Satan and set free the captives.

So now the church, though, every time we gather together, this is the place where the power of God is displayed and set on display. I mean, it's the power of God that is released every time we read and preach the word of God. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, Romans 1:16, so that when we preach the Gospel, that the power of God is going forth in a way, that's the only way that the power of God is going forth with the creative power, it's the same power that created the universe.

I love this in 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul makes this analogy, he says that the God who spoke light into darkness. Now think about that, the first act of God in creating the world ex nihilo, there's nothing, what does he do? He says, "Let there be light," and suddenly there's light. The same power that took darkness and emptiness and filled it with light and then created all that we see, that same power, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:6, has shined in your hearts through the preaching of the Gospel and you have been made alive."

So someone is here today and they don't know Jesus Christ and if they hear the Gospel and they place their faith in Christ, what has happened is the greatest creative power display possible since the last time someone else got saved, but really at the creation. We

don't see it but that's what it is. That's what we saw testified to in the baptismal pool, and we see it continuing in the sense that every time the word goes forth, God is continuing to accomplish his purposes in our lives. I mean, think about it, if we could see what the reality is with each other, what we would see, this is not so much like going to a beautiful landscape, this is like coming to an art gallery when you come to church and it's like Rembrandts and sculptures that are in progress, and if we had eyes to see it, we'd see that. We'd see maybe it's just begun and there is just the canvas and a little bit of paint on it and, you know, if you watch somebody do those chalk talks, you can't watch somebody do a painting, that's too slow, but we've see some pretty impressive chalk-talk kind of things. Have you seen those? And you watch and at first they do some stuff up there and, "What is that? I have no idea what they're drawing." You're trying to figure it out, you know, and you can't tell. Well, that's what's going on in our lives. We look at each other and say, "Man, I can't figure out what God is doing there. What is He doing with him? I don't know." Or he's got a rock and he's chiseling it and you can't tell with this cut and that cut what's happening but God, the artist, he sees it. These are treasures of his and these are evidences of his glorious love and his goodness and he wants us to delight in what he's doing in each other and what he's doing in us, and to see the beauty and to savor the beauty and to turn all of it into praise to him.

God can do that in your life. You may be here today and you may be thinking, "My life is a mess. My life is just unsalvageable." Not in the eyes of God. Anything is possible with God. Truly, we have no value in ourselves. None of us do. But if you repent and place your faith in Christ, you surrender your life to him, you put all of your hope in the finished work of Jesus Christ dying on the cross to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, if you place your hope in him and you believe he rose from the dead, he will save you and he will begin transforming you into his glorious likeness and you will become a work of his art.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9, he reminds us of the power and he's telling us, "Don't forget where you've come from." You look around you and you see these people that are at various times, you know, we're not where we should be, none of us are. He says sometimes it's helpful to think about where you were to give you perspective on where you are now. He says in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." What he's saying is if you live a lifestyle like that, even if you say you know Jesus and you live a lifestyle of those things, you will not inherit the kingdom of God because God when he saves you, he begins to start working on you. He doesn't leave you as you were, and it takes time, it's a work in progress but he begins changing you. He says, "Don't be deceived. If you think that, you're wrong." But listen to what he says, after that list of all these various kinds of sin, people whose lives were dominated by these various kinds of sin, he says, "Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

So when we come together, we don't know a lot of times the history of where people have come from. If we did, we'd give more glory to God. That's one of the reasons we ought to talk to each other more and ask questions like about personal testimonies and get to know each other so we can appreciate what God is doing and give him glory for it.

This, to the Lord, is the most beautiful place on earth. This is why the building, it's important, if we build a new building, we're going to pray and we're going to seek the Lord and we encourage you to pray for us to know what to do, we're going to be wise, but the building for a Bible believing Christian is very different than the building for like Roman Catholics. Roman Catholics, the building, the beauty and the glory is in the building. Look at the majesty of the cathedrals that are all over Europe. The Protestant places of worship are much more modest partly because the word of God is central but really also because the beauty is not in the building, the real beauty is in the people. So the building is nothing more than a frame around a Rembrandt painting. If you notice the frame, it's a bad frame. The frame is to draw your eyes to the artwork and you and I who belong to Jesus, we are his artwork. May God help us to esteem each other that way and build together his building.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the privilege of being Your children. We marvel at Your grace, that You would take us who were sinners, who were blind, who were dead in our trespasses and sins, all of us who belong to You now, we all come into the world that way, we're hopeless and helpless and yet we're not unsaveable because we have a mighty Savior, Jesus Christ, who is able to do all things. We thank You that He's able to take the person in the deepest bondage of sin and He's able to speak His word to them and deliver them from the domain of darkness and to translate them into His kingdom. And Father, we ask that You would help us to have eyes to see more and more and more what You are doing that we would value what You value, that we would love what You love, and that we would see as beautiful that which You see as beautiful. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.