

Introduction:

- A. Ask most people to tell you about their lives and they’ll start, “Well, I was born in…” This is my hometown—Britton, SD. Population: 1261. I’m sure most of you are proud of your hometown but can your town or city say this? My hometown was recently named South Dakota’s “Community of the Year”! We beat out Pierre and Rapid City and Aberdeen! A delegation met with Governor Daugaard! Big new railroad improvements. An addition to the school. All new sewer system. New streetlights. *They’re saying some really nice things!* So that’s where I’m from. That’s my hometown.
- B. One of the most basic things shaping our identity is where we’re from. Tell me about where you’re from and I get a feel for what has shaped you. Our identity as Christians is a lot like that—only we’ve never really *seen* where we’re from. **We’ve never actually been to our hometown.** Or maybe to put it a bit more accurately, we’ve only glimpsed one tiny neighborhood.
- C. I remembered an old song about hometowns, popular before I was born.

*I love those dear hearts and gentle people
 Who live in my home town
 Because those dear hearts and gentle people
 Will never ever let you down
 They read the good book
 From Fri till Monday
 That's how the weekend goes
 I've got a dream house
 I'll build there one day
 With picket fence and rambling rose.*

Well, I’m sentimental about my hometown but that song is pretty syrupy even for me! Christians need a better hometown song than that, and we have it in **Ps. 87. Turn there.** We don’t know the tune for this song, but I want to put these words in your praise repertoire—on your spiritual playlist.

The psalm begins by telling us...

I. THE LORD FOUNDED ZION, THE HOLY CITY HE LOVES AND CALLS HOME (87:1-2)

- A. Originally Zion was simply the name of a fortress on the relatively unimposing mountain in the Judean hills. It was occupied by the Jebusites till David conquered it about 1000 BC and made it his royal city. He brought God's tabernacle there so Israel could worship the LORD together. Then, along with Jerusalem, Zion came to be the name of God's city where his people worshiped him, and came to the altar for forgiveness of their sin, where they celebrated their festivals together, heard God's Word, and where God's king was enthroned. So Zion's hometown song begins with these words in **Ps. 87:1-2**:

He has founded his city on the holy mountain.

The Lord loves the gates of Zion

more than all the other dwellings of Jacob.

- B. That mountain wasn't very impressive, as mountains go. If it doesn't impress you it certainly didn't impress God, maker of the Himalayas and the Alps. What's so holy about *that* mountain anyway? Nothing—**till God made Zion his own.** God's presence among God's chosen people made it holy. Now, despite all the manmade clutter, it is the most sacred place on the face of the earth. But it isn't the *mountain* or the *city's buildings and streets*—it isn't the *place*—that God loves so much. **God loves people. God loves Zion because his people are there.** And his people call it home because God is there.
- C. *Illus.:* This old green screen door was once precious to me. I suppose I loved it more than any other door on earth. It was the door to the home I grew up in and through that door was my family. The psalm says that God has a door like that—“*the gates of Zion.*” The gates themselves are no more impressive to God than that old screen door but it's what's inside that causes the LORD to love those gates more than any other dwellings. **Because within the gates of Zion are the people God loves.**

This must be a wonderful city if God founded it and loves it so dearly.

Oh, indeed it is. In fact our song says, “*Glorious things are said of you, city of God!*”

II. GLORIOUS THINGS ARE SAID OF ZION! (87:3-7)

A. *Glorious things. Oh yes, I’ve heard about Zion. I’ve heard her walls and ramparts are salvation itself, that her gates are called Praise, and that she will be called Faithful City.*

And I’ve heard that one day the holy city in heaven will descend to the new earth, and that it will shine “with the glory of God, and its brilliance will be like that of a very precious jewel.”

Yes, I’ve heard the twelve gates will be of pearl and the streets will be of gold so pure it will be like transparent glass. That is glorious!

B. *It is all true, and all glorious. But none of that is what is most glorious about Zion.*

(In the margin of this psalm at this point there is that mysterious musical direction, *Selah*. I don’t know what it means but it is easy for me to imagine it signals a change in the music: *grande* - with pomp and circumstance, because the words sound like a proclamation, as if this song was sung by the King’s heralds from scrolled parchment.)

So back to the song about Zion’s glorious things. I can’t wait to hear it:

“I will record Rahab and Babylon

among those who acknowledge me—

Wait! What?? Did you say Rahab and Babylon?? Rahab is Egypt, that dragon nation who did all they could to destroy us. They enslaved us for hundreds of years and when we were set free, they tried to chase us down and annihilate us. And they would have if God hadn’t intervened. Like it says two psalms over, Ps. 89:10, “You crushed Rahab like one of the slain.” And now you’re telling me Egyptians are inside our walls, counted among those who acknowledge God’s name!? And the LORD is good with that??

Yes, and Babylon too. *Babylon!?* Those people drove us from our homes and carried us off to captivity. They destroyed our beautiful city and stripped the Lord's temple. In their far off land, they demanded we sing the songs of Zion to entertain them when all we wanted to do was weep. They're arrogant and brutal, and now you're telling me they're in too!?

...Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—

and [the Lord] will say, 'This one was born in Zion.'

Did I hear you right? Philistia. Philistines?

Palestinians? Did God forget about Goliath and the ways those people tormented and terrorized us for endless years?

Tyre. *The merchants and shipping magnates. The gold coast-ers. Always more interested in riches than anything else. Jesus himself said that city would be judged. How'd they get in?*

Cush. *Ethiopia. That's as far as our maps went. So there are people in Zion from the four corners of the earth?*

Yes, indeed. From Japan and Mexico and India and Kenya and even from the United States of America!

I try to imagine the ancient Jews trying to sing this song. I wonder if they wanted to check their translations! Or find a song that made more sense to them. Generally, they didn't want these people even close to their city.

- C. Did you notice how God identified these surprising additions to the citizenry of Zion? The LORD says these names are *recorded* (as on an official proclamation or a decree) "*among those who acknowledge me*"—who **know me**. God doesn't just mean people who've heard of his name. He means they *know* him as his bride. The LORD inscribes the names of people from those spiritually rogue nations in the permanent records of Zion naming those who know and love him. Only God's people are on that list. Only those who have no other gods, who love and worship him. It is the Book of Life. Yet there are those names from the most unlikely places. Today there are Egyptian Christians, like those martyred, Iraqi (Babylonian) Christians likewise persecuted. There are Palestinian and

Lebanese and Ethiopian Christians. All born again in Zion.
All invited to the home and table of God.

And while Israel looked nervously at those names, God said to “the sons of Korah,” *“That’s why we need a song to celebrate the day when people who were once far off, once my enemies, come to know and love me.”*

Paul wrote to the church in the wicked city of Corinth, *“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

D. So back in **Ps 87:4-5**, we continue our song:

***...and [the Lord] will say, “This one was born in Zion.”
Indeed, of Zion it will be said,***

***“This one and that one were born in her,
and the Most High himself will establish her.”***

The Lord will write in the register of the peoples:

“This one was born in Zion.”

“Indeed, of Zion it will be said...” If there’s one thing that should go on Zion’s website, one thing that Visitors Bureau should trumpet, one glorious thing you must know about Zion, it is *“This one and that one were born in her.”*

Three times our song repeats, “This one was born in Zion.” *Born*, of course, means they are native. They are not immigrants. They are not aliens. The place on their birth certificate is Zion. But obviously, these people were born in Egypt and Babylon, in Philistia and Tyre, and Cush, so how can they be born in Zion, too? *The Message* puts it this way, *“God registers their names in his book: ‘This one, this one, and this one—born **again**, right here.’ **Born again!** That’s how they can call Zion their home. They are born *again*, this second time as members of God’s chosen people, citizens—sons and daughters—of Zion.*

E. A few here among us were born as Jews, God’s chosen people, but all of us were born far from God because of our

sin. God found us on faraway highways and in dark alleys, in slums and empty mansions. We were blind and lame and leprous, but thanks to Jesus we were born again and brought home to Zion. The Bible says, “*Once you were not a people, and now you are the people of God!*” We look around at this home of ours, and the Voice says:

*“You have come to **Mount Zion**, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of **angels** in joyful assembly, to the **church** of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to **God**, the Judge of all, to the **spirits** of the righteous made perfect, to **Jesus** the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled **blood** that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*

Look around! We have come home!

- F. *So these are the glorious things spoken of Zion?* Yes, but there’s still one more thing:

***As they make music they will sing,
“All my fountains are in you.”***

All these rogue people now born again in Zion, knowing God, at home in his holy city. Look at them! Dancing and singing, “*All my fountains are in you.*”

*I’ve got a river of life flowing out of me!
Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see,
Opens prison doors, sets the captives free,
I’ve got a river of life flowing out of me!*

Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria, “*Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*” So all those who have drunk deeply of Jesus now sing, “*All my fountains are in you.*” *All that washes me clean, all that refreshes me in this dry and weary land, all that quenches my deepest thirst, all that gives me life—all my fountains are in you!*”

Conclusion

The city of God is both place and people at once. But it is the people that make it dear to God. ***Many glorious things can be said***

about Zion: her gates are like pearl and her streets like gold, there is no longer a temple for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. *Glorious things!* There is in that city the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, right down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stands the tree of life and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. *Glorious things indeed!* But the most glorious thing to celebrate is this:

A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

***“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”***

And when that happens, we will finally be home.

Till you know where you're from you won't know who you are. We are from a city we've never seen but it is our home. When you go out into the world, remember who you are. Remember what country you're from, who your people are. Remember that we are aliens and strangers here. There is a kind of wall that keeps us out. We don't belong here. We are the people of God. We are the city of God. We are the new Jerusalem. We are the sons and daughters of Zion. **Do not forget who you are!**