

# “All My Springs Are in You”—Lessons for Global Missions from Psalm 87

---

## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>1</sup> On the holy mount stands the city he founded; <sup>2</sup> the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. <sup>3</sup> Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah

<sup>4</sup> Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—“This one was born there,” they say. <sup>5</sup> And of Zion it shall be said, “This one and that one were born in her”; for the Most High himself will establish her. <sup>6</sup> The LORD records as he registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” Selah

<sup>7</sup> Singers and dancers alike say, “All my springs are in you.” (Ps. 87:1–7)

### Why Psalm 87?

- A. When it was given to me to preach a sermon on this latter part of our Missions Emphasis Week, I had every intention of carrying on in the book of Acts.
  - 1. I thought it would be rather simple to bring out implications for global missions from there. I had an outline started and everything.
- B. But then, as I was making my way through the Psalms in my devotions about a week or so ago, I came to that which Psalm we just read: [Ps. 87](#).
  - 1. And, from the start, it just captivated me. And as I reflected on these words, I felt like a sermon outline unfolded right there before me. So that is why we are where we are this morning. And I hope, by the time we’re through, you find it as encouraging and inspiring as I did.
- C. I see three lessons here in these verses regarding global missions and I wanted to spend a little time on each of them with you this morning: Lesson #1: It’s By God’s Doing ([vv. 1-3](#)); Lesson #2: It’s for All Peoples ([vv. 4-6](#)); Lesson #3: It’s from an Overflow of Joy ([v. 7](#))

## Lesson #1: It’s by God’s Doing (vv. 1-3)

### The “City of God”

- A. Look at [vv. 1-3](#) again. The first thing I want you to see, is the attention that’s immediately brought to what these psalmists call the “[city of God](#)” ([v. 3](#)).
  - 1. From the opening verses here, all eyes are on this city. But what is it?

- B. Well, when they mention this city . . .
1. They're talking about the place of God's reign and rule,
  2. the place of restored relationship between God and man,
  3. the place where the curse is undone and things are made forever right.
  4. They're talking about paradise, about heaven, about the world as it should be.
- C. It's what was pictured in the promised land with Jerusalem, or mount Zion, with the temple and the coming together of God and man by way of the altar of sacrifice and things.
1. But that picture was ultimately pointing to the new Jerusalem, a heavenly Jerusalem, as John tells us about in [Rev. 21:1-7](#) in particular: “<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.<sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”
    - a. Upon hearing that, don't you find that your heart suddenly starts to bubble with anticipation and joy?! Isn't this what you're longing for more than anything else? All things made new. No more tears, no more pain, no more death. God with man and man with God. Life and the world as it should be. That's what this city is about.
      - i. This is where God is taking us. This is where human history is headed in Jesus. It's pictured in the Jerusalem below, but ultimately pointing us towards the new Jerusalem that is from above.
        - (1) It's the city of God.
- D. This is the point of our mission, right? To share with people the good news about this city—that you can come in now, freely through faith in Christ.
1. He was crucified outside the city for your sin so that you can come into the city and dwell with God, your Creator and Redeemer, now and forever!

## “His Foundation”

- A. But now the second thing I want you to see in these verses is that this city is ultimately founded by God himself. It's not of our doing. It's all of his.
1. In the ESV translation we read from, the idea that the Lord has founded this city comes at the close of [v. 1](#): “[On the holy mount stands the city he founded . . .](#)” This is clear enough. We get the point.

2. But in the original Hebrew behind this text, the point is made even sharper. You see, interestingly, the order of things is flipped. The verse starts abruptly, almost jarringly, with what could literally be translated: “His founding”; “His foundation”; “His establishment”—something like this.
    - a. So put in order, and with wooden-literality the verse reads like this: “His foundation [is] in the mountains of holiness.”
      - i. The idea of God’s founding this city, then, is thrust to the forefront of this Psalm for the sake of emphasis. It’s the very first word in this very first verse. The note is struck from the outset.
        - (1) The psalmists are jealous that we not miss this critical point: the city of God comes only by way of the activity of God. It’s his doing . . . not our own.
- B. And, of course, with all this talk about God laying a foundation as stable base beneath his holy city, I couldn’t help but think of those verses that speak of Jesus as the very cornerstone of it all.
1. So in [Isa. 28:16](#), God says: “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”
    - a. Both Paul ([Rom. 9:33](#)) and Peter ([1 Pet. 2:6](#)) will later point back to this very verse and make it plain: God is referring to Jesus and his work on the cross. He’s the cornerstone of the foundation which God has laid underneath this city he’s establishing in Zion—the new Jerusalem.
    - b. So Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, declares boldly in the face of organized Jewish opposition: “<sup>11</sup>This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you . . . which has become the cornerstone.<sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” ([Acts 4:11–12](#)).
- C. It’s God’s city, built by him upon the lashed back of his crucified Son, for the sake of yours and my salvation.

## Implications for Us

- A. So as we consider our part in global missions and things, what does this first lesson that it’s all by God’s doing imply for us? Well, two things . . .

### Implication #1: We Have No Right to Change the Message

- A. Here’s what I mean on this first piece: It’s his city. It’s his rules. These are his gates. We don’t get to mix and match, pick what we like, drop what we don’t.
1. Jesus is the cornerstone, and as Peter says, there is salvation in no one else. We have no right to change the message in our attempt to advance the mission.

B. You could see this going wrong on either side, really.

1. On the one hand, sometimes we're tempted to reduce the message of the cross.
  - a. It's a stumbling block, it's offensive. You're telling me I'm not good enough, I deserve hell, those that reject Jesus, God will reject them?
    - i. We want to soften the blow. Maybe it's well-meaning. We want make things easier on people, more palatable, more popular. We want more people to come into the city, right?
      - (1) It's a noteworthy desire, but we must not, we cannot change the message in our attempt to satiate it.
2. So, on the one hand, sometimes we're tempted to subtract a bit from the message. But on the other hand, sometimes we're tempted to add to it.
  - a. This was the whole problem in the book of Galatians, right? This was the problem the Jews had with the message of the cross. It's too easy. Don't you have to clean yourself up first? Don't you have to earn your keep, prove your worth, make a case for your own justification and all of this?
    - i. We want to make it harder. Again, maybe it's well-meaning, with a concern for God's holiness. Free grace? How scandalous! You mean to tell me any old sinner can take a plunge beneath the Savior's flow of blood and come up washed clean and counted righteous in the courtroom of heaven and just march on into God's presence? That's offensive!

C. So we want to subtract from the gospel. We want to add to the gospel. But we have no right to do either.

1. Our commission is to simply steward the gospel, to proclaim it, to herald it. Or as Paul exhorts Timothy: *"By the Holy Spirit who dwells within [you], guard the good deposit entrusted to you"* (2 Tim. 1:14).
  - a. Guard the gospel with your life. But don't you dare change it!

## Implication #2: We Have No Power to Make Things Happen

- A. He's the one who founds the city. He's the one, as we'll see down in v. 5, who *"will establish her."* It's him, not us.
1. And I think that's important to remember when we consider the grand scale of global missions, because we're tempted to think it is on us, and we better get going, and we got to make things happen, get the job done.

- a. Don't get me wrong, there's a place for urgency and discipline and all of this, but it starts with dependency. We can't do it.
- B. This is why, as we've seen for many weeks now, in [Acts 1](#), even as Jesus is outlining the magnificent scope of this mission he's here putting his disciples on, he doesn't end the whole thing saying: "So go and get it done." No. He ends saying: "Go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, because you can't get it done without me."
- C. Jesus here is really just the revisiting of a principle he'd already established with them prior to this point. I've always been struck by the flow of logic in [Matt. 9:35-38](#). I wonder if you've ever noticed it. He's training his disciples, with a view to this global mission of course, and here's what we read: "<sup>35</sup>And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.<sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;<sup>38</sup> therefore [ . . . what? Go?! Get out and get to it?! No! . . . ] pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"
- 1. Do you see it? Do you see what I mean? There's great need. It's bordering on overwhelming. Therefore . . . pray. Because you're not the Lord over this harvest, he is. And if anything's going to be accomplished, he's got to be in it.
- D. Again, when it comes to global missions, there is most certainly a great urgency, and we need to feel it, but there must also be a deep dependency, because we can't do it without him.

## Lesson #2: It's for All Peoples (vv. 4-6)

- A. In the transition between Lesson #1 and now Lesson #2 we read this in [v. 3](#): "[Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God.](#)" These words are meant, I think, to prepare us for the glorious words that are about to be spoken in [vv. 4-6](#).
- 1. It is in these verses now where we are not just going to learn about this city in general, but the citizens of this city in particular.
- B. Let me make a few observations for us . . .

### "Those Who Know Me"

- A. Notice, as it seems now God himself is proceeding to describe the citizens of this city of his, he refers to them first as "[those who know me . . .](#)" ([v .4](#)).
- 1. To know the Lord in the way referred to here is an intimate, profoundly personal thing. It signals a depth of relationship and communion.
    - a. It's the sort of thing God promised would come in the new covenant, if you remember, in [Jer. 31:34](#): "[And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of](#)

them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34). He’s getting sin out of the way and he’s bringing his people close in towards his very heart. They know him.

B. I wonder: do you know him in this way? You can . . . through Christ!

### “I Mention . . .”

A. Now, back in the context of Jer. 31, as we would expect, he’s talking about the “house of Israel” in particular—“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD” (v. 33).

1. And so we think: “Ah okay, this covenant is for the Jews.”

B. And that is then what we expect God will go on to expound upon for us as we continue in these verses back in Ps. 87.

1. But to our great surprise that is not where God goes at all. Things take a stunning, staggering, even scandalous turn at this point.

a. For he goes out of his way to draw attention to the fact that, it is not just ethnic Israel who knows him, but people from all manner of nations: “Among those who know me I mention [I call specific attention to . . .] Rahab [a reference to Egypt (cf. Isa. 30:7; 51:9)] and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush [i.e. Ethiopia] . . .” (v. 4).

i. Now, God could keep going. This is just a sampling of the kinds of people who will come in and be identified as citizens of his holy city, natives of the new Jerusalem. But here’s the point . . .

C. First, God wants us to see that what he has in mind here with this new Jerusalem and new covenant isn’t just for Israel as she’s ethnically defined. It’s for all peoples who would, in a sense, come into Israel, come into the people of God, through Christ, the promised offspring of Abraham.

1. This is what Paul is referring to in Gal. 3:26-29, when he writes to Gentile Christians no less: “<sup>26</sup> [I]n Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

a. The new covenant is yours in him. You have “come to know God.” Or, even more, as Paul goes on to put it later in Gal. 4:9, you have come “to be known by [him].”

i. If you are in Christ, therefore, as he writes at the close of this epistle, you are “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). You’re his holy people, composed of men and women from all peoples.

2. At this point, I thought of what Jesus says in John 10: “<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.<sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (vv. 14–16).
    - a. “My sheep know me and I know them. And my flock will not just be composed of ethnic Jews, it will be composed of sheep from all the nations. That’s what I’m laying down my life for!”
- D. But more than that, with this list of nations and cities God gives us back in Ps. 87:4, we have to understand the Jew reading this would have straight choked on his falafel.
1. And not just because these are Gentiles being referred to here. That would have been hard enough.
  2. But the most scandalous part about all this is the fact that every nation or city on this list, at one point or another had been a bitter enemy.
    - a. The three most obvious examples are:
      - i. Egypt—who had them enslaved for those centuries before Moses;
      - ii. Babylon—who under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and carried them off into exile;
      - iii. and Philistia—the Philistines who we see David and others were always at war with.

(1) And yet all of these are said to be, in some way, a part of the citizenship of Zion?!
- E. It makes you think even I could get on that list. God, in Christ, is making enemies friends. You see we’re reconciled not just to him through the cross, but to each other as well.
1. Just listen to what Paul says about this in Eph. 2:11-22: “<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility<sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,<sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.<sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows

into a holy temple in the Lord.<sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

## “This One Was Born There”

- A. Back in our Psalm, if you noticed, a lot of attention is drawn in these verses to where a person is “born”. I think it’s a reference ultimately to the fact that you and I are born again in Christ. But let’s look at the vv. 4-6 again . . .
- B. There are different ways of interpreting these verses, but it seems to me there’s a sort of progression to the logic.
  - 1. First, in v. 4, we’re told that these Gentile peoples have been born “there.”
  - 2. Then, of course, the question that immediately arises is: born where? And that’s what’s answered for us in v. 5: *And of Zion it shall be said, “This one and that one were born in her . . .”* These are people born, among the nations, yes, but also, in some mysterious way now, they are born in Zion.
  - 3. And then God gets in on the matter and he gives his final stamp of approval. So we read in v. 6: *“The LORD records as he registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’”* These Gentiles, he agrees, have been born in Zion. They belong in this city just as much as any believing Jew.
    - a. This is why Paul would say back in Gal. 4:26: *“the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.”*
- C. God’s recording and registering the people recalls the “Lamb’s book of life” from the book of Revelation, where we understand essentially that there are names in that book written in the Savior’s blood.
  - 1. And that’s how one passes through the gates of the city into paradise. You’ve got to get on the guest list or you don’t get in the city. You have to prove your citizenship or you won’t make it through customs.
- D. We read earlier about the New Jerusalem from Rev. 21, well, we continue on later in that same chapter and read that *“nothing unclean will ever enter [the city], nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (v. 21).
  - 1. Well, how do I get clean? How do I get in the book?
    - a. Come to the Son. Cling to his cross. By the Spirit, receive the new birth and your new heavenly citizenship in him.
    - b. It doesn’t matter where your from. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done. All that matters is you know him and he knows you.
- E. The gospel, the mission, this city . . . it’s by God’s doing and it’s for all peoples!

## Implications for Us

- A. So bringing all this to bear on global missions and our part in it, what does this second lesson now imply?
- B. Well, for one thing, it implies that you're not outside the scope of God's grace.
  - 1. Even if you've been locking horns with God up to this point, at odds with him, making war against him . . . he still loves you. He's still got open arms and an open heart for you.
- C. But, of course, this also means that no one else is outside the scope of God's grace either.
  - 1. God loves the folks that maybe you can't stand. God hopes for the people that maybe you've given up on. God cares about the countries and the cultures that maybe you and I don't pay any mind to.
    - a. These verses were meant to jar the Jewish people I think—to wake them back up to their purpose, to their mission, to the reason he saved and blessed them in the first place. God had always saved them with a view to saving the nations. He'd always blessed them with a view to blessing the nations.
      - i. But in the midst of that blessing and things, they forgot their purpose. Let's not forget ours!

## Lesson #3: It's from an Overflow of Joy (v. 7)

### "All My Springs Are in You"

- A. This psalm ends on this wonderfully celebratory note: "Singers and dancers alike say, 'All my springs are in you'" (v. 7).
  - 1. As one commentator puts it, with the reference to singers and dancers here we have "praise in two of its most exuberant forms" (TOTC). It's a worshipful song and dance.
    - a. And I think this is great because it sets the whole discussion about this city and its citizens, and even the idea of our global mission, within the context of joy.
- B. I say that missions is from an "overflow of joy" particularly because of this image the psalmists go on to give us when they mention these "springs" that are sourced in the city and ultimately in God himself.
  - 1. It's likely a reference to the same sort of thing Ezekiel talks about in [Ezek. 47](#), where he has this vision of waters that are issuing from below the temple threshold and flowing out to revive the barren lands of the world around.
  - 2. This is the living water that Jesus talks about as coming ultimately from him and his sacrifice at the cross.

3. This is what John refers to, again, when he's talking about the city of God there in [Rev. 21](#): "To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (v. 6).
  - a. "[W]ithout payment"? Why? Because it's cheap? No. Because Christ paid for it . . . with his life. It's offered freely to us, but it cost him everything.
4. And, of course, this spring forms the headwaters of that river John describes in the next chapter, [Rev. 22:1-2](#): "<sup>1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

## Depth and Breadth

- A. Now, as we begin to draw things to a close here, I want to press into this metaphor of a spring for a moment because I think it's very helpful when we come to consider missions . . .
- B. A spring as you know, in one sense, has two dimensions to it.
  1. It has both depth and breadth.
  2. There is something subterranean, underground. And then there is something that spills over and flows out.
- C. And I think this is a helpful image, because usually when it comes to missions we think of that second dimension: the breadth, the outflow. We think of the waters flowing to the nations and bringing life there. And that is good.
  1. But, and here's the critical point, the only way a spring gets breadth is if it also has depth.
    - a. If we don't have depth we won't have breadth. We will dry up.
    - b. But as we give ourselves truly to deep relationship with God—where we're soaking in grace, we're drinking in of the love God has for us in Jesus, where we're satisfied in him—we won't be able to help but have breadth, because he will move our hearts with the things that move his.
- D. You might think of the woman at the well in [John 4](#). I love this example.
  1. She's thirsty, right? Not just physically, but spiritually. She's been with man after man after man. And it hasn't quenched the thirst of her soul.
  2. But Jesus sees her, he loves her, he leads her to the living water that comes from his grace, his mercy, relationship with God through him. And it fills her.
  3. She leaves her watering jar at the well. I don't need this water anymore. And she runs back to town to tell others about him. And they all start coming to know Jesus as well. That's how it works.
- E. Another example, did you notice who wrote this psalm? It's ascribed to "[the sons of Korah](#)." You've got to know these were guys who understood and experienced the goodness of God's grace.

1. Korah was one of the Levites who, back in the day, tried to foment a revolt against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). He didn't get why these guys got special access to God and so much authority and favor. And he was bitter and angry. And others in Israel were rallying around this.
2. And so God comes in judgement and rightfully so. We're told that the earth just opens up and swallows Korah and his family. And it would seem on first read that there are no sons of Korah left.
3. But then later, in Num. 26:11, we find out that not all the sons of Korah died in that judgement. And as Levites they were still given special roles to fill in the household of God—to be gatekeepers, to lead in song. And you've got to know they were amazed. "Why do I get to be here? Why was I spared? I don't belong here."
4. It's no wonder, then, that when they experienced the grace of God to that depth, they could sing, not begrudgingly, but for joy about how God is going to bring in people from all nations—even from among their enemies. Because they know: "We were once enemies, but we were shown mercy. We want others to know this as well." Do you see how that works?

F. It's the same for you and I.

1. The ground should open up beneath us and right here right now for the sins we've committed, for our rebellion against a holy God, for the way we trample his glory in the dirt day after day. We should just drop down alive into Sheol like Korah and his crew.
  - a. But we haven't. Why?
    - i. Because at Calvary, as Jesus hung on that cross, it's as if the ground opened up and swallowed him in our place. He dropped straight into the hellfire of God's wrath not because of his own sin, but because of ours.
      - (1) So we could be forgiven. So we could know God. So we could be born again. So we could be citizens of the city of God. So our names could be written in the Lamb's book of life. So we could drink freely from the spring of living water.

G. Makes you want to sing. Makes you want to dance. Makes you want to go tell the world. Makes you want to overflow!

1. This mission we've been given in Jesus: it's by God's doing, it's for all peoples, and it's from an overflow of joy!