

# “The House of the Lord”

## Psalm 122:1

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March 22, 2020

SERMON 1901

by Michael David Henson

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The sermon text is from Psalm 122:1, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord.’”

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The early church had their gatherings in houses, where pastors preached the Word of God and broke the bread of our Lord’s Supper. It wasn’t long before these Christians were persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. They didn’t take this privilege of gathering lightly but continued steadfastly in receiving God’s gifts. When the persecutions prevented home meetings, the believers in Rome gathered in the catacombs. There, these believers showed their fearlessness by drawing Christians symbols of the hope of eternal life upon the graves of believers. They knew that “man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word which comes from the mouth of God.”

In order to attempt to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, many non-essential services have been shut down, like video gambling operations and bars. Grocery stores are open, but restaurants must find other ways to serve their customers than dining in. Although, many would consider attending church to be a non-essential service, we know otherwise. We, too, needed to seek other ways for me to be your minister of Word and Sacrament.

It may be surprising to your neighbors that receiving the preaching of the Word, gathering for prayer with your brothers and sisters in Christ, and receiving the Lord’s Supper is that important to you. When they ask about your church attendance, be sure that they know that you are not required to attend. You are not attending out of fear of God’s punishment, nor for the purpose of earning favor with God. You have been set free by Jesus Christ from the accusations of the law. Tell them you freely and gladly go to the house of the Lord.

St. Paul compares the two sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael. Just as all of us were by nature born into sin according to the flesh, so Ishmael was born a slave of a bondwoman. The child, Isaac, however, was a gift of God’s promise and born of the freewoman. Through faith in Jesus Christ we have been born again into a living hope. Though the law shows us our sins and attempts to scare us with the fear of God’s punishment including death, we are God’s children on account of God’s promise in the gospel. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” St. Paul says in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

We come to church to confess our sins, knowing that there is no condemnation. We come to church to hear the glorious news of the forgiveness of sins, believing the words of absolution, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself. Our Lord said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” We are Christians! We do remember! Here is our Lord’s body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. Whoever believes these

words has exactly what they say, forgiveness of sins. Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

We need not fear the accusations of the Law for we have the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ. We need not fear the threats of illness and death, for we have the promise of eternal life. We have a good and gracious God, who has provided a medicine of immortality and bread of life to sustain us on our journey. St. Polycarp, a disciple of St. John the Apostle and a martyr for the faith, was told to deny Christ or face death. He responded to the Emperor saying, "Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong.... How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"

We freely gather this day, no matter how inconvenient. As Psalm 122 says, we are glad when they say to us, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.' We are the pilgrims who rejoice in having our feet standing in God's house. This is the place "where the tribes of the Lord go up....to give thanks to the name of the Lord."