

The room was full of pregnant women and their partners, and the pre-natal class was in full swing. The instructor was teaching the women how to breathe properly, along with informing the men how to give the necessary assurances at this stage of things. The teacher then announced, “Ladies, exercise is good for you. Walking is especially beneficial. And, gentlemen, it wouldn’t hurt you to take the time to go walking with your partner!” The room got very quiet. Finally, a man in the middle of the group raised his hand. “Yes?” replied the instructor. “Is it all right if she carries a golf bag on this walk?”

We are close to concluding our Lenten “walk” through the songs of ascent, the Psalms that make up the heart of the Psalter. It’s been a purposeful walk, to become better acquainted with songs that were likely sung by Hebrew pilgrims as they went up to the great festivals at the Temple in Jerusalem. What they don’t say in these songs is, “I have arrived!” Rather they say, “I was here for a moment; I sang to the Lord; and then I moved on in my journey.”

This psalm has two parts: David’s *resolve* (v. 1-9); and God’s *response* (v. 11-18). It’s also the longest of the songs of ascent. The pilgrims who sang this psalm were making their way to Jerusalem by tracing the journey of the Ark of the Covenant. The first half of the psalm is David’s oath in which he promises to return the Ark to Jerusalem. The second half records God’s corresponding oath, promising David a son on the throne and an everlasting dynasty.

David is not the author of this psalm, but its most certainly about him. It was probably written by his son Solomon for the dedication of the Temple. David’s son writes of his father’s *resolve* and God’s *response*. Psalm 132 recalls the events leading to the construction of the Temple. David brought the Ark to Jerusalem; but it was Solomon who built the Temple in which it rested. The Temple was the focal point of pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the Ark resided in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred area of the Temple. Since this psalm deals with the object of the pilgrimages, it is appropriately placed near the end of the collection as pilgrims came to their destination. Each psalm highlights certain pilgrim traits or personal qualities. The theme of today’s psalm is faith or, to be more precise, **obedience**. Warren Wiersbe has said, “**Sin** always robs us; **obedience** always enriches us.”

David was determined to obey God; and nothing would keep him from his objective, in spite of what is called his “*self-denial*” in verse one; translated “*hardships*” in the RSV. All sorts of opposition forces conspired to keep David off the throne, and to dethrone him once he was anointed king. The same word is translated “*afflictions*” in the King James Version. We may be troubled by pandemics and many other things, but nothing should deter us from trusting in God. If they do deter us, our faith might appear only half-hearted.

Let me take a moment to describe the Ark to you. The Ark was a wooden box about a yard long and 18 inches high, covered with gold plating. Poles were attached, so it could be transported without touching the Ark. It contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron’s rod. On the Day of Atonement the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the mercy seat, the lid of the Ark, atop which sat two cherubim, that is, figures of angels with outstretched wings, facing each other.

This sacred object was revered by many but it could not be controlled. God was not “in the box.” It merely represented his presence among his people. It was constructed and kept in the Tabernacle during

the wilderness wanderings following the exodus from Egypt. When the Hebrews reached the Jordan River, the priests walked into the river with the Ark, and the waters parted. The people followed, entering the Promised Land on dry ground. Because of this miracle, the Israelites regarded the Ark with a high degree of superstition. They later took it into battle as a secret weapon, hoping it would bring them victories. Instead, they were defeated and the Ark was captured by their enemy, the Philistines, who later returned it to the Hebrews after God afflicted them for keeping the Ark as a war trophy. The Ark was kept in “the fields of Jaar,” otherwise known as the town of Keriath-jearim. It was neglected and all but forgotten. But verses 7 and 8 recall the urgency that David felt in rectifying the situation and honoring God by transporting the Ark to Jerusalem.

It’s unclear when the Ark disappeared after that, although the Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims to have the Ark. (By the way, it really wasn’t found by the Nazis or by Indiana Jones!) It was entrusted by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba and their son Menelik for safekeeping, according to Ethiopian royal chronicles. The Ark allegedly resides in a sanctuary, the Ark Temple, in Axum (the original capital of the biblical land of Cush), where priests guard it, and no one is allowed to see it. As one Ethiopian Christian and journalist has written, “I don’t believe there could be any more miracles with the Ark because we are the temples of God now. The Spirit of God resides in us. We are the Ark of God,” writes Hashim Ahmed in *Christianity Today* (June 14, 1999).

In verse 13 God states that he has chosen Zion (i.e. Jerusalem) as his dwelling. We who trust in the Lord are his Zion today, his holy city, where he dwells through his Spirit. When David realized that it was wrong to keep the Ark in an obscure place, he vowed to bring it to its rightful place, the city of Jerusalem. He “*swore an oath*” (v. 2) and would not rest until this was accomplished.

The 132nd Psalm reflects how committed we ought to be to **obeying** God’s will. When God is calling us and leading us, we are compelled to follow God wherever he leads. You see, the only part of the Bible we truly *believe* is the part we *obey*! That’s worth repeating. **The only part of the Bible we truly believe is the part we obey!** When we witness David’s obedience in Psalm 132, we’re encouraged by the psalm to be equally determined to obey God as David was. Eugene Peterson once wrote, “A Christian who has David in his bones, Jeremiah in his bloodstream, Paul in his fingertips and Christ in his heart will know how much and how little value to put on his or her own momentary feelings and the experiences of the past week.” When we study the Psalms we know Who to trust, Who to follow, and Who to obey.

Notice too that God gives more than is asked; his response is much larger than David’s prayer. In verse 8 David asks God to come to his people. Then in verse 14 God declares that he will reside with his people “*forever and ever.*” David asks that God’s “*priests be clothed with his righteousness*” in verse 9. God promises in verse 16 that he will clothe Zion’s priests “*with salvation.*”

God’s oath includes a promise that he will “*make a horn grow for David*” (v. 17). Back then horns were seen as symbols of strength; the horn also refers to David’s son, Solomon, and to Jesus, our King of kings. Another thing promised here is a “*lamp.*” God will enlighten his anointed servants, and through the lineage of David God will provide the “*light of the world.*” In addition, the enemies of God’s people will be clothed “*with shame*” (v. 18). Evil will be defeated. Righteousness will flourish in victory.

The fulfillment of God's pledge points ultimately to the Messianic age. God's oath is a prophecy of the eternal throne of David, personified in the coming Messiah. At least this is how the rabbis understood the psalm prior to the Christian era. Kingdoms rise and fall, but the reign of God is forever! Many of us are wondering how long the coronavirus outbreak will last. The answers to that question remain uncertain, but the Kingdom of God will not be fully realized until the King comes again. We who know him and serve him wait for his coming, as surely as we wait for an end to the coronavirus pandemic.

Merriam Webster says the word "corona" is something suggesting a crown: such as: 1) a colored circle often seen around and close to a luminous body (such as the moon), 2) the tenuous outermost part of the atmosphere of a star (such as the sun), or 3) a circle of light made by the apparent convergence of the streamers of the aurora borealis. The closing verse of Psalm 132 also mentions a crown, "*a radiant crown*" that will "*sparkle with splendor*" according to *The Message* translation. How's that for turning an astrological and terrifying word association into a good and glorious word association? true

We can be most thankful today that our God and King is still on the throne, where he intends to stay. He's not about to quit or give up on this world. He has chosen to reside with us *and* within us. As for our part, we can trust him and put our lives in his hands. A bulletin blooper from a church listed the hymn title as, "Our God Resigns" instead of "Our God Reigns." The ubiquitously true message of Psalm 132 is that, **God will never resign.** The intensely personal message of Psalm 132, which is much harder for us to recognize and live, is that, **The only part of the Bible we truly believe is the part we obey!** Amen.