

# As we journey on

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this morning, if we had followed our original sermon schedule, Dr. Ong Meng-Chai would have been standing in the pulpit or maybe in this room today, bringing God's word to us. But for obvious reasons, he is not able to be as he is on the other side of the Great, of the South China Sea.

But when we mutually agreed to cancel, and I told him that we'll be looking at the Psalms during this season, he said to me, Ah, good to know that you have turned to the Psalms instead.

Timely. And I trust that as we've journeyed over the last few weeks, looking at a variety of Psalms, they have been timely. I certainly found the time looking at them enriching.

As Etenasius, the great church theologian from the early times, once remarked, the Psalms are glorious because they embrace the whole life of man, the affections of his mind, and the motions of his soul.

And I've also been consistently surprised by how much the Psalms keep leading us on to Jesus.

Someone asked me last week, are all the Psalms about Christ?

[ 1 : 08 ] And I suppose a quick one-line answer would be, yes. At the very least, they put us on the road to Christ. Apparently, the monks in the medieval church used to say, Semper in ore samus, semper in corde cadus.

Latin for always a psalm on the lips, always Christ in the heart. And I hope that our time in the Psalms have placed Christ at the centre of our hearts.

But for the moment, we are going to finish off our time in the Psalms. And as I'll mention later on during announcement time, we'll be moving on to hear the words of Jesus himself in the coming few months.

And yet, our time in the coronavirus age has clearly not finished. In many ways, it's just getting started. There are going to be plenty of aftershocks. The past few weeks, I've noticed plenty of articles with titles like this.

How the coronavirus is changing education. How the coronavirus will change supermarkets. How the coronavirus will have lasting effects on our habits. Our lives are going to change.

[ 2 : 15 ] It's changed already. And it's going to be a long journey. And my hope is that the Psalms that we've been looking at will have provided some anthems for this journey.

Evoking memories of God's goodness and grace. Planting our hearts and minds firmly in Him.

Giving us hope for the future. And so this morning, for one more time, we're going back to the book of Psalms.

And we're going to learn yet another anthem for this coronavirus age. But this one's going to be slightly different. We're not going to be looking at just one psalm, but a string of psalms together. Psalms 124 to 126. These three psalms are from a section that runs from Psalm 120 all the way to Psalm 124. And they're known as the Song of Ascends.

You will notice that the inscription at the beginning of each of this psalms makes that clear. And these are songs that pilgrims would have sung as they slowly made up their way to Jerusalem for one of the festivals.

[ 3 : 19 ] These are the anthems on their playlists, written at various points in their history, but collected together sometime after the exile.

And so these are psalms for a road trip. And we can sing them today too, as we journey through this coronavirus age to the age to come.

And not only that, but as we look at these three psalms this morning, we'll get to recall and reinforce some themes and images that we've already seen from the last few weeks. And so that's another reason why I thought that they would be appropriate to look at today and a great way to finish off

this series.

And this will be a change from what was advertised initially when we announced this series. And just as a little aside, you might have noticed or realized over the period of this MCO that the psalms are actually split into five sections or five books.

Psalms 1 to 41, 42 to 72, 73 to 89, 90 to 106, and then 107 to 150. And we've actually done at least one psalm from each of the first four books, all of which have a slightly different pattern or emphasis.

[ 4 : 34 ] And so this morning, we'll kind of complete the set since psalm 124 to 126 comes from book five. And what we're going to be asking is this.

As we journey on, what will provide our bearings? As we journey on, what should be our latest? Well, what's going to happen now is that Emmy, one of our church members, is going to read the psalms.

She should appear on the screen shortly and then we'll answer this question. So I'm going to pass the time now over to Emmy. Thanks, Emmy.

So we're asking the question this morning. As we journey on, what should be on our playlist? So let me suggest these three songs.

Song number one, Our help is from the Lord. Our help is from the Lord. Turn with me to Psalm 124 and notice that we have one of David's compositions.

[ 5 : 41 ] And it's a song for when times look utterly and completely hopeless. Have you ever been in a situation like that? Perhaps there's been a family member of yours who is chronically ill or who has a mental health condition.

He or she has some sort of ailment that requires a lot of attention. And you're feeling the strain because it's such a heavy burden. You're exhausted. You're at the end of your role.

Or perhaps right now, during this MCO, you can't sleep because every night you're worrying about how to pay the bills, how to pay your workers, how to pay your debt. Or you can't sleep because the sense of isolation is growing day by day.

You can't see your friends. You can't attend important occasions. You're trapped in your house. The waves of anxiety unleashed by COVID-19 feel overwhelming. But you can't stop them crashing down on you.

Well, David knows your pain. He knows your exhaustion. In verses 3 to 7, he uses four different images to picture what you're going through. There's a sense of being swallowed alive.

[ 6 : 53 ] That's three. Imagine a giant monster closing in on you, ready to swallow you up in one bite. And so you've got that feeling of terror that you're going to die.

And that's how David feels as some sort of monstrous mob is closing in on him. And sometimes that feeling is mixed in with another unexpected emotion.

Just that feeling of, I just want to die. Especially when it seems like the whole world is angry with you. And that's why you sometimes hear the expression, I wish the earth would just swallow me up. And then there's the picture of drowning, verses 4 and 5. It's like a river that has burst its banks, or a dam wall that breaks. And now all the waters are gushing down on you, overpowering in its sheer force, and you're absolutely helpless to stand against it.

And did you know that just a few inches of water is enough to lift up a vehicle off the ground and then turn it over? And now, the water surrounds you.

[ 8 : 02 ] Your feet are taken from under you, and you're swept away. The current's pulling you underwater. And in verse 6, the picture changes again, and this time there's a sense of being torn apart.

You remember back on Good Friday, in Psalm 22, where David describes the lions, and the dogs, and the wild oxen all surrounding him, looking to devour its prey?

Once again, that's happening here, as you're being chilled up and spit out. And then in verse 7, there's that picture, that sense of being trapped.

We're like a bird, caught in a snare, knowing that we're in dire straits, but seeing no way out of it. We're just waiting for the worst.

And so David knows your situation, because he's been in that situation. We're not sure what he's referring to, although many commentators suggest 2 Samuel 5 as the background, where the Philistines attacked him early on in his reign.

[ 9 : 13 ] But whatever it is, that sense of danger is extremely strong. It's overwhelming and unexpected, like the monstrous smog and the floods.

It's savage and hidden, like the wild animals and the snare. It reminds us of Psalm 91, all over again, where treps exist by day and by night.

And let me come back again to the flood imagery, which of the four images in this song seems to be the dominant one. For David did not randomly speak of floodwaters, simply for poetic effect.

You know, in the Old Testament, and certainly in the Psalms, the floodwaters and the seas are often a picture of chaos and devastation. Look at Psalm 46, verse 2 to 3, for instance, where the sea is described as something we naturally fear, whereas waters raw and folk and even the mountains quack at its waves.

Or Psalm 69, verses 14 and 15, where David's enemies are compared to the deep waters, which can so easily swallow him up.

[ 10 : 25 ] Or in other places, such as Daniel 7, verse 2 and 3, where the sea contains monsters that are often symbols of evil. And so the sea and the floodwaters are often pictured as these powerful external forces bringing down chaos and devastation upon us.

But more than that, the floodwaters and the sea can sometimes be a picture of judgment. Most obviously, think of the story of Noah, where the floods come as judgment against an evil world. Think of the Red Sea during the Exodus, where the waters swallow up the armies of Egypt as a form of judgment against their arrogance. Think of images like those found in Isaiah 57, verse 20, where the wicked are like a tossing sea who find no rest.

And so sometimes, the waves don't just come as agents of chaos, but they come as storms of correction. Now, that's certainly true in Israel's history.

Sometimes, they bring on the tragedies upon themselves. When human enemies invade them, they're like a tidal wave because of their own idolatry.

[ 11 : 47 ] Now, I just want to be clear that if there are waves crashing over you right now, it's not necessarily because of your sin. Many times, it isn't. But occasionally, it just might be God's storm of correction designed to steer you in the right direction.

But here's the thing. When the waves come, either through nor fault of our own, or because we've foolishly ignored God in one way or another, we feel the pangs of remorse, don't we?

We ask, what if? Now, this isn't a theoretical what if. A theoretical what if is when we ask, hmm, what if Cristiano Ronaldo never left Manchester United?

Would that have men that Manchester United would have more and more titles? No, no, no. This is the what if of regret. What if I had not spent on those items and just saved a little bit more money? Maybe now, I wouldn't be in such a deep hole. What if I had spent more time with my mother now that she's in a nursing home and I can't visit her?

[ 13 : 00 ] And so our playlists are filled with songs about things that we wish had gone differently. It's filled with flashbacks of regrets. But David encourages us to change our playlists.

Because bleak though the situation is, this is not a psalm played in the minor key. In verses 1 and 2, David asks, what if? But it's not a theoretical what if.

It's not the what if of regret. It is the what if of thanksgiving. What if, verse 1, the Lord had not been on our side?

What if, verse 2 onwards, the Lord had not been our defender against the mob, our barrier against the flood, our fire against the wild animals, our rescuer from the snare?

We would have been swallowed, engulfed, trapped, torn. But thank God, He is on our side. And so verse 7, there is escape for David.

[ 14 : 06 ] We have escaped like a bird from the foulest snare. The snare has been broken and we have escaped. Because the Lord is the difference maker.

He is the differentiating factor. In this drama, He is the key character. What a big difference it makes, doesn't it? When the maker of heaven and earth himself offers His help, take verse 6 to 8 in reverse.

When the maker of heaven and earth is our helper, verse 8, there is absolutely nothing in this world that can keep us in prison, verse 7. And so verse 6, praise be to God.

Praise be to the Lord our God. And so as the pilgrims travel to Jerusalem, singing this song, their minds would have gone back to the many points in Israel's history where this would have been true.

They will remember God using Moses leading them through the Red Sea. They will remember God using Joshua leading them into the promised land through the Jordan River.

[15:17] And yes, they will remember God using David to quench the Philistine threat. You see, when God is on our side, we can stand firm, whatever the situation, however big the intimidation.

Over and over again in the Psalms, God is constantly calming the raging seas. Look at Psalm 89, verse 9, for instance. We won't turn that, but I'll just throw that out for the reference.

And so no wonder when the Lord Jesus comes and then he goes out on a boat and then he encounters a storm and he does the exact same thing.

He steals the storm. The disciples fall back in shock and they cry out, Who is this? They know from the Old Testament who alone steals the waters.

And so who is Jesus? Well, we know who he is. He is the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And our help comes from him.

[16:23] Because Jesus not only steals the seas, but he goes through the waters for us. That's how he once described his atoning work on the cross.

In March of the 10th, verse 38, he asked his disciples, Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

In other words, he's asking, Can you undergo the death that I'm going to descend to? And they foolishly say, Yes, of course we can. But of course, they can't.

Only Jesus can die in our place and take the judgment we deserve. But now, in Christ, we can go through even the waters of death and live.

That's what our baptism pictures. We die with him, we will rise with him. And so what happens when we keep playing the anthem of Psalm 124?

[17:27] We are reminded our help comes from the Lord and so we must depend on him. You know, if we're thinking, Oh, I can handle this situation on my own.

Or we're thinking, I don't need help. Help is only for weak people. And I'm not weak. I'm strong. Well, we're listening to the wrong cues. Or if we're thinking, Hmm, God only helps those who help themselves, right?

After all, we cannot always be dependent, right? And it's not a good thing. We need to learn to be independent. Well, that sounds humble, but it certainly isn't biblical.

You see, we aren't dependent on God the way a heavy smoker is dependent on his cigarettes. God isn't a bad habit that we should kick. Rather, we're dependent on God the way our bodies are dependent on food and drink.

To survive and to try, we need to keep eating and drinking. And we never say that we're independent of food and water. And so we keep depending on God.

[18:40] We recognize that our life comes from Jesus. And so that means doing whatever it takes to stay connected to Jesus. Trusting his words.

Living by his words. Responding to his words by praying to him. And when we do that, we can journey on even in a coronavirus age.

We will face the floodwaters, but God can pull you through. And when he does this, you can praise him. You can't praise yourself because it had nothing to do with you.

He gets all the glory, all the credit goes to him. Now for some of us, the question isn't, can he? But the question is, will he?

Will God come true? And the answer is yes, if you trust in Christ. You see, if you know Jesus truly, God is always on your side.

[19:45] As the Apostle Paul says, if God is for us, who can be against us? After all, he did not spare even his only son. Now the promise here, of course, isn't that every worldly desire of ours gets satisfied.

The promise is that as you face the animals and the snare, you will still see God in action. Now what that action is, I wouldn't know.

But you can be sure that God is executing that action for your good. David bears witness to this. We can live and sing even in a depressed world because it is God's help that can give shape to our days.

And that's the joy we can derive from the first song on our playlist, Psalm 124. Let me just give me a moment as I take a sip of water.

Well, let's move on to the next song on our playlist. Song number two, Our home is with the Lord. Our home is with the Lord. Psalm 125 deserves a place on our playlist because it reminds us of one important truth.

[ 21 : 09 ] We journey on because we're not home yet. In that regard, it's like Psalm 84, which we looked at a few weeks ago. Now how does it remind us that we're not home yet?

Well, look at verse 3 and notice that it says that the scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land. But what does that assume about who's in charge right now?

The wicked, the unrighteous, those opposed to God. They will not remain, but right now, they are right there, holding the reins of power.

Again, this could apply to different points in Israel's history. Perhaps the Assyrians are in charge. Perhaps the Babylonians are. And they still apply to our point in history.

In verses 4 and 5, both the upright and the evildoers still live side by side. They are both present in this world. And verse 3 has just revealed how common it is for the evildoer to have the upper hand.

[ 22 : 14 ] Now isn't that still our world today? Even in the COVID-19 age, we're still aware that there are leaders and governments around the world who do not have God's interests or the interests of others on their hearts.

Indeed, some of them have taken advantage of the situation to crack down further on Christians and abuse minorities. And a world where evil is still dominant is not a world that can be our home.

And that's why we journey on as exiles and surgeonists to use the words of the Apostle Peter.

We're simply passing through. Not because the physical world is bad in itself and we're going to some eternal lounge room in the sky as this embodied souls, No, that's a common misunderstanding of the Bible's teaching.

Rather, we're passing through because our current location is currently inhabited by evil and sin, causing disruption at every level of human life.

Personal, spiritual, emotional, social. We're passing through because our home is a setting where evil and sin no longer have a place.

[ 23 : 35 ] That's what God has promised. And the good news is that one day we will be home. The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land of the righteous.

One day we'll be God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing. One day we'll be in the kingdom of the righteous, eternal, global, and glorious king of Psalm 72.

But until we're home, we journey on. And let's pay closer attention to the lyrics of this song because Psalm 125 reminds us of two things that are key to our journey.

Firstly, it reminds us that although we're not home yet, we have the security of home. That's why those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

Mount Zion, you see, is no ordinary mountain. It symbolizes God's presence, God's protection, and God's privileged relationship with us. It's immovable.

[ 24 : 48 ] It's eternal. And verse 2 further unpacks that security for us. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forevermore.

You see, because the Lord is all around us and that's why we already enjoy in some measure the blessings of home. We have the security of home because the Lord is already with us and He surrounds us and our home is with the Lord.

Now, that's astonishing because think about it. In Psalm 124, how are we described? We are like a bird trapped in a snare.

We're weak, helpless creatures. And yet, in Psalm 125, how are we described? Like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken.

we're a bird and a mountain both at the same time. How can that be? Again, the difference maker is the Lord.

[ 25 : 59 ] He helps us escape the snare and then He surrounds us like a mountain range. Here is the paradox of the Christian life. We are strong when we are weak.

We are strong when we are weak. Think of concrete. Now, we know that concrete is strong material. But apparently, concrete is like that because it's weak in the first place.

It's full of tiny holes which means that any force that gets exerted on it gets distributed throughout, lessening the pressure on it. And so, the Christian life is somewhat similar.

When pressure comes, we realize we are weak and we run to God for help. And as we depend on Him, He takes on the treasure and we are strengthened.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion. Although we're not home yet, we have the security of home. That's the reassurance.

[ 27 : 02 ] But what else does it remind us of? Secondly, that we shouldn't make this world our home. We shouldn't make this world our home.

Look at verse 3. The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous for then, the righteous might use their hands to do evil.

Now, this seems to be the main point of the Psalm. Don't compromise. You see, when we are placed in a foreign environment, there is strong pressure to conform, isn't there?

That's why your friend, after living in the UK for a while, acquires a British accent. That's why your quiet son, when he goes off to boarding school, is suddenly going to all these rowdy parties with his friends.

The pressure to conform is strong. And so the Psalmist anticipates that in a land where evildoers have the upper hand, the righteous would be tempted to do evil.

[ 28 : 05 ] The possibility that we forget our true home and make this world our home is ever present. And it's instructive, isn't it, that the Psalmist doesn't see the presence of his enemies as his biggest danger.

Rather, what he fears most is moving away from God. And even in the coronavirus age, it's important to remember that COVID-19 is still not the biggest issue in our lives, big as it is.

It is our relationship with God that matters most. And during this time, as we come under stress, the ugliest parts of our hearts might begin to show.

Perhaps we take the place of God by casting judgment without knowing the full picture. In a news report that I read, a poor grocery worker was heckled, shamed, and reported by his neighbour for breaking the rules even though he was considered an essential worker.

I think this was in Italy. Perhaps the need to seek comfort is meant by going to alcohol or going to internet pornography.

[ 29 : 25 ] You know, whatever it is, there's no doubt that during this stressful time, the temptation is going on. And so, once again, we pray.

We plead with him, verse 4, to do good to those who are good. We know that no one is good, but that this side of the cross, Jesus has made us good and upright as his righteousness is credited to us.

And now, as those credited with his righteousness, we still plead with him to do good to us. Do good to us, Lord, and help us not assimilate.

Do good to us, Lord, and help us trust in you and not do life in our own strength. do good to us, Lord, and keep us from going the way of evil to us.

You see, as we journey on, that should be our prayer. Keep us safe, Lord, not merely from the pandemic, but from the path of the unrighteous.

[ 30 : 33 ] For if the pandemic claims our lives, we simply arrive home. But if we get onto the path of the unrighteous, and we stay there, never turning back to Jesus, we will never get hope.

But what is it that will keep us going as the journey gets longer and longer? Well, let's look at song number three.

Our hope is in the Lord. Our hope is in the Lord. That's Psalm 126. Like Psalm 124, it begins with the pilgrims recalling some glorious event in the nation's history.

They recall, once again, a past intervention of God. But here's what I think is different. It's not so much the event they recall, rather they recall how they felt during this time.

Just read verses 1 and through with me. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.

[ 31 : 51 ] You see, think about some of the most wonderful experiences of your lives. Perhaps it was a road trip. Perhaps it was a youth camp. Perhaps it was your wedding day. But it was so amazing that it felt like a dream come true.

In fact, all these years later, you're not wondering if it was in fact just a dream after all. And that's how Israel felt as they recalled what God had done.

You see, the Lord had been so good to them. Their mouths burst forth with songs of joy. This event, whatever it was, was so remarkable that they couldn't keep it inside. They had to go public.

Look at verse 2 again. Then it was said among the nations. The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy.

But that's the past. What about the present? There's an abrupt shift of tone in verse 4 as the joy of restoration gives way to hints of desperation.

[ 32 : 56 ] Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. And once again, the pilgrims are praying for they've gone from the party to the desert.

That's what the Negev was, a desert in the south of Israel. But here is what they're asking. The Negev is obviously a dry place. But occasionally rain will fall.

And when that happens, what happens next is absolutely breathtaking. You see, the shallow streambeds in the desert will suddenly overflow. And almost overnight, with all the streams running through the desert, the place will bloom with flowers.

The desert has been transformed. And that's what the pilgrims are praying for. They know that as long as we live in the time before God comes to judge the world, the experience of verses 1 to 3 will come and go.

There will be good times, but there will also be times in history, like now, where it feels like we're in a place with no sign of life, not a beautiful flower inside.

[ 34 : 12 ] and there will also be times in our own walk with Christ, where spiritually we're dry, and not all is right. And so as pilgrims, they cry, restore our fortunes, O Lord, and so do we.

And notice that verse 4 deliberately echoes verse 1. Their memories of past restoration now feel their prayers for future restoration.

They recall the Lord's past mercies, as the psalmist also did last week in Psalm 80, and which moves them now to a place to plead earnestly with God to make His face once again shine upon them.

And so as we journey on, that's what we always cry for. Restore us! Do it again, Lord! Make the waters flow again! Make the flowers bloom again!

Make our church fill with life again! Wouldn't it be amazing if in the midst of the desert, the church became extremes once again?

[ 35 : 25 ] Restore us! Do it again, Lord! God has done it before. He can do it again. That is the prayer and that is the hope of the saints.

Those who go out weeping, carrying seed with soul, will return with songs of joy, carrying cheese with them. That's the hope.

But what are we to do in the meantime? We pray, but I believe the main application is actually found in verse 5. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

We pray, but we must sow. Now what do we sow? Psalm 126 doesn't specify for us, but the New Testament points us in two directions.

Firstly, we sow the word of the gospel. In every age, Christians have the same message. Jesus is the Christ, the King who rules over this entire universe, who has come now to establish his kingdom, and who now invites us to be part of his kingdom by faith through his death and resurrection.

[ 36 : 41 ] That is our message, and one we shouldn't be ashamed of. After all, we get to testify about the one who can touch us in a world where it's all down or about social distancing and contactless delivery.

We get to testify about the one who can take away our fear and who holds our future. We get to testify about the one who fulfills our every longing for security and who works at the highest level of competency.

You know, there's one thing that this pandemic has exposed, it's our hunger to have a hero. It's our hunger to have a saviour. That's why Malaysians have put Datuk Noor Hisham on a pedestal.

We need to have a hero, otherwise we feel hopeless. But good as he is, Datuk Noor Hisham cannot make the desert bloom again.

Only Jesus can. And so we need to sow this word of the gospel as a word of hope to the world. But we also need to sow the word of the gospel, not just in the world, but even in the church, for the church to be an oasis of the gospel.

[ 37 : 56 ] We need to keep reminding ourselves about who Jesus is, about what he has done, about the eternal hope we have in him. And if the word of false prosperity teaching is sown, or the word of prophetic nonsense is sown, well, it can be assured that there will be no corresponding songs of joy, for that's poison, not nourishment.

So sow the word of the gospel. And secondly, we sow the seed of good works. In Titus 2 verse 13, God describes his people as those who wait for the blessed hope when Jesus comes again. But then in the very next verse, in verse 14, he then shows us what kind of people we are as we wait. He says we are those who are eager to do what is good.

We are those who are eager to do what is good. And in a pandemic, it's more crucial than ever that we are eager to do what is good because we want to make the message of Jesus beautiful.

We have the word of the gospel, but we want to make the teaching about God our saviour attractive, as Titus 2 verse 10 puts. During this pandemic, churches have gotten a bad name as places where transmission of the disease easily happens.

[ 39 : 25 ] Well, let's counteract that. Let's make church a place where transmission of good works easily happens. And as we sow, there will be tears.

It will be hard. It will be challenging. It will break you and me sometimes. After all, notice that Psalm 126 never gives any indication of the lack of time between the sowing and the reaping.

We just don't know. Months. Years. It could even be an entire lifetime. Well, no wonder there are tears. But the very fact that we still sow even in this time indicates hope.

Because when you plant a seed, that means you believe that something will grow out of it. And God says, as you sow with tears, you will reap with joy.

as you pray, do it again, Lord, they can be free. For our hope is in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, who made the plants grow, and who has made the light of Christ shine in the hearts of you and I.

[ 40 : 48 ] And so there you have it. Three songs to put on your playlist as we continue journeying on in this coronavirus age.

Song number one, our help is from the Lord, so depend on Him. Song number two, our hope is with the Lord, so don't compromise.

Song number three, our hope is in the Lord, so sow with tears and weep with joy. And above all, remember the words of Psalm 125, verse 1, which is what I'll leave you with.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Sion, which cannot be shaken, but enthused forever. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we come before you again this morning, we thank you again for all these songs and we thank you today, especially for the song of a sense that those songs that the pilgrims would have sung as they traveled to Jerusalem.

[ 42 : 09 ] And Father, even today, as pilgrims who are traveling to the new Jerusalem and who are encountering a particularly difficult stage of that journey, Lord, we pray that we will continue to remember that you are the difference maker.

Help us to continue to seek help from you, knowing that we are helpless. Help us to continue to recognize that our home is with you and help us not to turn away from the path of the righteous onto the path of the wicked.

Help us to see that our hope is in you, that even though now it seems like the Negev, it seems like a desert, but we pray, Lord, that you would use us, you would use your church and that you would restore us so that we would be like streams in the Negev once again.

and that we would be able to bring the word of the gospel to those around us, even as we adorn the gospel with good works, good acts of love.

So keep our eyes fixed on our eternal hope and will you help us to keep persevering to never give up. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

[ 43 : 38 ] Amen.