



-- Read Psalm 118

-- Pray

-- Background

- 1.) The Psalms speak most directly of the author's immediate thoughts and experiences.
- 2.) The Psalms also tell timeless truths and speak with attitudes, aches, and aspirations that are common to all God's people in all eras.
- 3.) Much of the Book of Psalms, and Psalm 118 in particular, are lesser pictures of greater realities that are fulfilled in Christ.

Regarding our Psalm for today, it is very helpful to note that Psalms 113-118 are known as the "Egyptian Hallel" or the "Egyptian Praise." Because they so powerfully speak to the sublime salvation that began in Israel's Exodus from Egypt and would be spread to the nations, these Psalms have been sung during the annual celebration of the Passover since early times. As custom has it, the first two Psalms, Psalms 113 and 114, are sung before the Passover meal, and the remaining four are sung after it. Therefore, since Jesus' arrest occurred just after He and His disciples had shared the Passover meal together, Psalm 118, was very possibly the last hymn sung together by Jesus and the disciples on the night that He was betrayed.

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner sets the stage beautifully for this Psalm, writing, "The stir of a great occasion lends its excitement to the Psalm as it

proceeds, and we become aware of a single worshipper at its center, whose progress to the Temple to give thanks celebrates no purely private deliverance...but a victory and vindication worthy of a king.”

And, as we do, let us do so understanding that *he is us*. For, as we will discover by the journey’s end, his trek is our trek, and the path that he is taking into the courts of the Lord is a pilgrimage that each of us must make. As he draws near to the altar, so must we. As he comes to give thanks, so must we. And as he bursts forth in the celebration of salvation, so will every heart that hears and understands the glory of the Lord.

Please let every other thought fade away this morning and picture the scene with me now: It is a great occasion in Israel. People have come from everywhere—it would seem—and a phenomenal festival has erupted in the anointed city. You have never in your life seen anything quite like it before, and you are tempted to dally in the delights of this day. But you remember that you have come to this place with a purpose. You have come to travel alongside the single worshipper of our Psalm. Thus, you continue to weave rather skillfully through multitude of travelers until you have finally managed to scurry through the crowds.

Unexpectedly, you suddenly find yourself standing at his side. But it becomes instantly apparent that this man is no ordinary worshipper. No, this is the king! This worshipper in question is the king of Israel himself! And it dawns on you: “What a joy! What an opportunity!” For on this day you have the profound privilege to travel alongside the king!” Doing your best to conceal your robust enthusiasm and to look like you belong, you stand with him proudly as he now takes the first step of this auspicious journey through Jerusalem... heading directly for the gates of the temple... heading directly for the horns of the altar. You have now taken your place next to the king, and this journey of a lifetime begins.

After traveling just a few short strides, you notice that the king appears to be talking to himself. No... wait... he is *praying*... and, oh, is he ever praying! His words ring forth with such an invigorating intensity that your heart becomes magnificently mesmerized. You hear with wonder and listen with delight as he begins to pour out his passions and praises before the Lord.

Then, suddenly stopping in his tracks and staring into the heavens, this ruler of men shouts the praises of verse one, exclaiming, “*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever!*” And behind this declaration of the limitless love of God, is the anticipation of the exultation of the entire nation in celebration of the goodness and grace of God—when in confirmation of God’s kindness, all of Israel will confess, “*His love endures forever!*”—when in affirmation of God’s affection, all the house of Aaron will affirm, “*His love endures forever!*”—when in declaration of God’s devotion, all who fear the Lord will declare with one victorious voice, “*His love endures forever!*”

With these wondrous words of worship sublimely spoken, the journey carries on, and the king now engages in personal reflection. These passionate prayers of praise have apparently caused the king to recall the many trials and tribulations that have led to this day of triumph, and he begins rejoicing in the flawless faithfulness of the Lord. With sincerity in his steps and vigor in his voice, he affirms verse five, saying “*In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.*” With tenacity in his tone, verses six and seven sound forth: “*The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.*”

Then verses eight and nine abruptly ring out, and in them you hear the unshakable hope in his heart. In his extreme exuberance, the king summons to the crowds that have stretched out the streets and sings at the top of his lungs, “*It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man! It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes!*” He shouts it to the masses because this is a maxim for every man. It is a **lesson for every life. His refuge is in the Lord.**

Clearly the king’s enemies were many. Clearly he was relentlessly besieged, besmirched, and bombarded. Clearly his life was constantly on the line. Clearly he had every earthly reason to fester in fear and dwell in doubt. Even as you are walking with him in the center of this special celebration, you can see the cold-hearted conspirators creeping in the shadows. You can plainly pick them out: They are the ones applauding with their hands, yet plotting evil in their hearts. Their malice is palpable. It pierces the procession and seeks to sabotage the celebration.

But not for the king. He is neither dismayed nor discouraged, nor is he dissuaded from the delight of his duty. In the face of his suffering, he remains centered in faith. In fact, he now presses forward all the more confidently, anchored in his assurance that the dangers all around him have been completely cut off by the Lord. As you move on, you hear him praying the powerful poetry of verses 10-14, stating:

“All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off. I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”

You can see it in the expression of eyes and you can sense it in his certitude of his spirit: There is perfect power in the name of the Lord, and that power has given this king an uncompromising purpose and unmitigated praise. Thus, he steadfastly sings about the strength of the Lord who alone has become his salvation, and although he is surrounded by enemies, this king remains strong in the Lord.

Moving forward again, you can now see the gates of the temple ahead. Your ultimate destination is in sight and the din of the crowds is growing louder. Their jubilation is drawing closer. Indeed, as verses 15 and 16 record, *“Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: ‘The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things! The LORD’s right hand is lifted high; the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!’”* For this day at least, the thoughts of the crowds are directed toward the Lord, and they joyfully attest that He alone is the source of their strength and the giver of all glory.

You have quickly come to realize that the king at your side has certainly seen the strength of the Lord. In fact, he seems to have perceived it from such a personal perspective and has loved God with such an inspiring intensity that, to the exuberant exaltation of the people, he is able to add the remarkable affirmation of verse 17, saying, *“I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.”* And understanding that God alone can undo the consequences of sin, he

declares, *“The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.”*

After hearing these words, you look up and realize that the multitudes of jubilant worshippers are not only growing larger, but their praises are becoming more thunderous with each passing second. However, that is no longer your chief concern. You now find yourself walking in lock step with this godly king whose prayers have stirred the very substance of your soul. As you ponder his passion in your heart, you suddenly look up and notice that the time has come. The procession has arrived, and the imposing gates stand immediately before you.

Yet, before you can comprehend what is occurring, the king raises his arms high and calls out to the Lord, and the words of verse 19 permeate the celebratory skies of Jerusalem. With a vibrant voice, he cries out to the heavens, *“Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.”* In reply, the unified echo of the temple court swiftly retorts with verse 20, chanting *“This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.”* Trusting entirely in the Lord who has delivered him from death, the king looks to the heavens with confidence in his countenance and, with the words of verse 21, he declares unto Almighty God, *“I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.”*

In that instant, the majestic gates swing wide open, and, as they do, you are nearly bowled over by the force of the cheer that ensues. The entire assembly, alive with elation, suddenly erupts into the most overjoyed ovation that your ears have ever known. Speechless and amazed at the spectacular scene, you cling to the king and pass through the glorious gates.

Just then, you notice that the king is once again engaging in reflection, and it becomes readily apparent that the words of verses 22-24 are bringing profound delight to His heart. Joy colors his countenance as he thinks to himself, *“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”* This king, you see, had been discounted and discarded. He had been scorned and ridiculed and overlooked. The government officials, religious leaders, and other so-called “builders” of Israel had wanted to go in a different direction and build the nation upon someone else. Yet, right now—as this

victorious king triumphantly enters through the glorious gates of righteousness—right now it is clear that *“the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.”*

The sheer delight inspired by this truth becomes such a deluge of joy that he bursts forth with the phrasing of verse 24, exclaiming, *“This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!”* Many times, you have sung that very phrase before, but you never understood it like this. This Psalmist isn’t talking about every single day. No, he’s talking about *this* day—this day upon which the stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone—this day upon which the gates of righteousness have been thrown open—this day upon which salvation has been secured and celebrated. *This* is the day that the Lord has made!

So there you stand in the courts of the Lord rejoicing with gladness because of this day that the Lord has made. And as your heart is filling with faith and festivity, the entire temple court proclaims in unison, *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.”* This truly is a day for rejoicing!

But the journey is not yet complete, and the king leads the way to its ultimate goal. Echoing verse 27, he presses forward as the crowds announce, *“The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.”* This is the pinnacle of the procession. This is the apex of the adventure. The entire festival—from the exhortations of the king to the exultations of the people... from the inception of the journey to its entry through the gates—all of it now culminates in this moment of sacrifice.

As the king approaches the altar and presents his offering, he pauses and gives thanks to the Lord. Your heart is fixed upon him as he bows humble obedience and wholeheartedly offers the prayer of verse 28. He prays, *“You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.”* Resolutely rising to his feet, he now fixes his gaze upon the crowds that have come, and, with the words of verse 29, he imparts the words of praise with which the procession first began, crying out, *“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever!”*

Yet, as the offering is made and while the people are enthusiastically applauding, you begin to wonder to yourself, “How on earth did I get to this exalted position? I mean, I am no king. Do I really belong in this scene?” In the context of these questions, though, you can certainly associate with many parts of the pathway that the king has taken to get here. He was besieged, besmirched, and bombarded by enemies. So are you. Your enemies may not be the raging armies of foreign nations, but they are just as real and every bit as destructive, if not more so.

As Ephesians 6:12 informs, your enemies are “*the rulers...the authorities...the powers of this dark world...and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*” These enemies destroy through twists of the truth and enticements to sin, and like the foes of the king, they lurk all around. They surround us all, sowing sorrows and suffering in their wake. They conspire and cajole and consume. Their tool is temptation and their success is your sin.

However, unlike the king, who in verse 13 said, “*I was pushed back and **about** to fall,*” you know that you *have* fallen to this foe... and not just once or twice, but many times. And though you regret it, you know that the scourge of sin has certainly had its successes in *your* journey. The buzzing bees of unbelief did at one time infect you with their venom, and the pressures of impurity have often pushed you over the edge.

Moreover, in these moments of honest reflection, you are reminded that the gates of the temple—the very gates through which you entered with the king—are really reserved for the righteous alone. The king just said as much in verse 20, declaring, “*This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.*” King David attested to the same in Psalm 15:1, asking the question, “*LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?*” And the answer comes in Psalm 15:2-3: “*He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman.*”

But you know this description is not true of you. Your walk has not been blameless. Not even close. You have not always spoken the truth from your heart. Slander has indeed proceeded from your lips, and there have decidedly been times when you have done your neighbor wrong and have cast slurs upon others. So,

you ask yourself, “How on earth did I get here? How did I manage to pass through the gates of the temple? Why do I now stand at the horns of the altar? How could I possibly have arrived so freely in the courts of the Lord? How?”

“It must have been because you are with the king,” you think to yourself. “But... wait. This king of Israel certainly seems to be a very godly man. But he is not without sin. He cannot be.” You know from Scripture that “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). Becoming more and more bewildered you ask yourself, “How could anyone enter these gates of righteousness?” Then you remember what was obvious at every step of this journey to the temple: The Psalmist was radically reliant upon the Lord.

And in this moment of insight, the glorious greatness of God begins to rise up in your spirit, reverberate in your mind, and resonate in the very marrow of your bones. This truth floods your heart with praise because it instantly occurs to you that there is much more going on in this journey than immediately meets the eye. You remember that this Psalm you are now experiencing would soon become the final Psalm of the Passover celebration. And, although the Passover Feast found its roots in the Exodus from Egypt, it forever finds its culmination in Jesus Christ, who became the perfect Passover Lamb for all people in all places at all times. Since these events point back to the lesser Passover, surely they must point forward to the greater one as well.

Not only that, but you are made aware that certain portions of this Psalm, especially verses 22-27, are quoted in no less than eleven books of the New Testament, and it is frequently applied directly to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, not only does this Psalm *relate* the king’s story, but it relates *to* the King of Kings, Jesus Christ, as well. In this light, it instantly becomes clear that your triumphal entry into the courts of the Lord was not due to the king by whom this Psalm was penned but to the greater King to whom this Psalm is pointing.

And in that realization, the prayers you have heard through the pen of this Psalmist now explode with new joys. His words resound with new wonder, and his meditations are flooded with fresh meaning. The incomplete images in the text are now made complete in Christ. As Paul, Peter, and Christ Himself all attest,

Jesus Christ is “*the stone the builders rejected,*” and He has now and forever “*become the capstone.*”

Furthermore, all four Gospels reveal Palm Sunday to be fulfillment of verses 26-27. As the Passover crowds in Jerusalem spontaneously celebrated the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, these words were fulfilled. With the boughs of verse 27 in hand, they shouted to Jesus the refrain of verse 26, exclaiming, “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.*” Thus, in this procession of Psalm 118, you have become fully aware of a reality that the crowds all around you could never have foreseen. As Kidner notes: You are blessed beyond belief to understand that this ceremony “would one day suddenly enact itself on the road to Jerusalem: unrehearsed, unliturgical, and with explosive force. In that week when God’s realities broke through His symbols and shadows, the horns of the altar became the arms of the cross, and the ‘festival’ itself found fulfillment in ‘Christ our Passover.’”

It becomes blissfully obvious that Jesus Christ is the ultimate picture of the single traveler from the text. For example, although He suffered, He remained centered in His mission. Although He was surrounded by evil, He stayed strong in the will of His Father. Although he was entirely righteous, He was nonetheless rejected. And although He was chastened for our sin, He still conquered the grave. Therefore, His triumphal entry that is foreshadowed in this Psalm forever paved the way for all who have ever entered into the righteous courts of the Lord.

Can you see the glory of God today through this wonderful window of truth? Can you see that Jesus Christ the culmination and completion of this text? *He* is the perfect image of the love of the Lord that endures forever. *He* is the ever-present Helper by whom we are healed. *He* is our one reliable Refuge and the lone Destroyer of our debt. *He* is our Strength, our Salvation, and our Song. *He* is the one and only Companion with whom all of us must combine on this on this trek that all of us must take. And so the question resounds: *Are you walking with Him on this journey today?*

Let us realize from this text that it is Jesus Christ Himself who is the Lord’s almighty Right Hand. *He* is our Deliverer from death. *He* is the Gate for the guilty, the Door for the downtrodden, and the Salvation of sinners. *So are you*

walking with Him today? He is the resplendent Righteousness that men have rejected. He is the incorruptible Capstone that cannot crumble. He is the Road to redemption, the Light for the lost, and the one great God of all glory. So please hear the question again: *Are you walking with Him today?*

Even though the battle was single-handed, the victory is shared. That is, even though the success of salvation belongs solely to our Savior, God has promised that He will bestow His blessings upon all who confess with that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead. Let me ask you, then: *Have you confessed it? Do you believe it? Have you made this triumphal entry into the courts of the Lord? Have you come through the gates of righteousness by clinging to the Lord Jesus Christ?*

If you have... Are you still clinging to Him today? Are you still hanging on His every word? Are you still walking with Him with every step of the way? And if you never have made this triumphal entry into the courts of the Lord, won't you please take the journey with Jesus today? Remember, He alone can take you there, because, "*He is good* and "*His love endures forever.*"