

Summer in the Psalms – Everlasting Lovingkindness

Psalm 118
ABC 9/18/22

Psalm 118 was Martin Luther's favorite psalm. He wrote,

This is my psalm, my chosen psalm. I love them all; I love all holy Scripture... But this psalm is nearest my heart, & I have a peculiar right to call it mine. It has saved me from many a pressing danger... It is my friend; dearer to me than all the honors & power of the earth.¹

He put vs 17, **I will not die, but live, & tell of the works of the Lord**, on a plaque on his study wall where he could see it every day. We don't know who wrote this psalm or when but it seems to be a song for a festive processional & corporate worship. It's also the last of a group of psalms known as the Egyptian Hallel (113-118), which were praise songs sung at feasts & festivals, especially at Passover. We're told that when Jesus & His disciples had eaten the Passover meal they sang a hymn & went to the Garden of Gethsemane & Ps 118 was the last song Jesus sang with His disciples. Think about that: This psalm was sung by Jesus just prior to His arrest, trials, & crucifixion. Realizing that should make this psalm very precious to us. Besides that, this psalm is about proclaiming the excellencies of God's deliverance & salvation. We'll only be able to skim the surface today.

1. The Call to be Thankful (1-4) The opening & closing vss of this psalm are identical & state the theme, **Give thanks to the Lord, why? for He is good**. The Lord's goodness is the reason that moves the psalmist to tell his fellow worshipers to give thanks to God. But he isn't satisfied with declaring the general goodness of the Lord. He zeros in on a special kind of goodness & so he says, **for His lovingkindness is everlasting** (1, 29). Then he calls upon 3 groups to repeat that refrain. **Lovingkindness** is the almost untranslatable Hebrew word, *hesed*. It's been translated as God's covenant love, loyal love, steadfast love, & lovingkindness. The psalmist is celebrating the fact that God remains steadfast & immovable in His love for us despite our not deserving it, despite our wanderings, failings, & stumblings. This is the steadfast love of God that keeps His promises to Israel despite her failings. As Is 54:10 tells us, **“For the mountains may be removed & the hills may shake, But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, & My covenant of peace will not**

¹ Luther, *Selected Psalms III*, p 45

be shaken,” Says the LORD who has compassion on you. This is a call to the nation Israel & to us to praise God for His enduring love. We all need to be stirred up to give thanks to the Lord, not just when things go our way but always because God is always **good** & His **lovingkindness is everlasting**. Even when we go through difficult trials (5, 10-13), the Lord is **good** & His **lovingkindness is everlasting**. His very nature is **good**. As Paul states, there’s absolutely nothing, including tribulation, persecution, or even death, which can **separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rom 8:35-39). God will be true to His character & will keep His word. He will always follow through on His promises. When all else fails, we can trust God both now & forever. Underlying the entire psalm is the experience of God’s salvation or deliverance (14, 15, 21, 25). If an enemy is attacking & about to succeed, you need God to save you. This is also a picture of our spiritual condition. Because of our sin, we’re all **children of wrath** (Eph 2:3) & under God’s condemnation (Jn 3:36). We’re one heartbeat away from judgment & eternal punishment. & so salvation, being rescued from God’s judgment, is the greatest need of all. When, through faith in Jesus Christ as the One who bore our punishment, God saves you, His lovingkindness should be your continual thanksgiving song.

2. Thankful For Suffering Because we don’t naturally see that salvation is our greatest need, the Lord puts us in desperate situations so we’ll cry out to Him to save us (5-13). The psalmist reveals he’s in distress (5) & his enemies hate him (7). But it’s not just a single person or a small group that’s after him. The nations surround him like a swarm of bees (10-12). They pushed him violently so he was on the verge of falling (13). In such conditions, **From my distress I called upon the Lord; the Lord answered me & set me in a large place** (5). 3 quick lessons here:

A. God uses trials to show us our need for Him. We pray most fervently when we go through trials. When things are relatively smooth, we should pray. But our prayers become much more focused & fervent when we’re in difficult times. These prayers should be offered in faith that God is able to deliver us. The psalmist refers to God as his refuge (8-9), his help (13), & his strength, song, & salvation (14). He knew that if God didn’t come through, he was doomed. Out of great need, he prayed. So should we.

B. God is for us. When trials hit, we sometimes doubt the goodness of God. *If God is good & if He loves me, why is He permitting this trial?* But the psalmist affirms, **The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?** (6). What can man do to us? A lot! They can oppress, slander, hurt, hate, maim, & murder, for starters. But the point isn't what harm humans are capable of inflicting on others. The psalmist is saying that although evil people can do evil things, in the end they can't really harm us because our lives are preserved by God. He repeats it in vs 7 as if to assure himself, **The Lord is for me...** (cf Ps 56:4, 11; Heb 13:6). Evil men can cause emotional & physical pain, including death. But they can't do anything that's ultimately harmful to us, because they can't take God's salvation away from us. Knowing **the Lord is for Me** brings peace which replaces fear. If God is for us, absolutely nothing man can do will thwart the purposes of God.² As Jesus said, **Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul & body in hell** (Mt 10:28). Paul states it wonderfully, **If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** (Rom 8:31-32). Although we may be alone & in immediate danger, we can still say, *I will not be afraid, because I trust in God.* Paul wrote, **We are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered** (Rom 8:36; Ps 44:22). But he added, **I am convinced that neither death, nor life... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rom 8:38-39).

C. God alone saves us. 8-9

In this crushing crucible, the psalmist had a choice. Either he'd trust God or he'd look to man. He could rely on princes, forging an alliance with foreign leaders or he could trust God. He testified clearly that it's better to **take refuge in the Lord**. Why it is better to trust in God rather than man? Spurgeon gives 5 answers. 1st, it's wiser. God can be trusted; man can't be. 2nd, it's morally better. God tells us to trust Him, teaching at the same time that humans are corrupt, selfish, & untrustworthy. 3rd, it's safer. It's dangerous to trust those who are disposed to let us down, because they certainly will. 4th, it's better in its effect upon ourselves. We grow in faith & character when

² Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 12, Holman OT Commentary, p 228

we trust God, not when we place that trust in others. 5th, it's better as far as its results are concerned. God honors our trust by blessing it.⁵

The psalmist goes on & attributes his victory to **the name of the Lord** & God's **right hand** (11-12, 15-16). His trust was in God alone to save him from his enemies. Trusting in God alone & crying out to Him in prayer aren't necessarily our automatic reactions when trials hit. Often, we scramble to provide our own way out. But prayer & faith should be our 1st response, before we do anything else. Although there are instances where God told His people not to do anything, except to watch Him deliver them (Ex 14:13, 14; 2 Chron 20:17), God's normal method is for us to use the means that He provides. We're to trust in Him, not in the means, but we use the means in dependence on Him. Here, although the psalmist had men around him who helped him (7) & although he had to fight the enemy, he didn't trust in his friends or in his own ability. His trust wasn't in man, but in the Lord. God often uses trials to show us our need. Maybe it's a health issue, where we may die. Maybe it's a financial crisis, where we don't know where our next meal's coming from. But our real need isn't just to get through the crisis but to get right with God. To do that, we must see that we're sinners, guilty before God. He sent His own Son to bear the penalty for sin that we deserve. & we must see that He offers forgiveness for our sins & eternal life when we trust in Him alone. As Paul puts it, **For by grace you have been saved through faith; & that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast** (Eph 2:8-9).

3. Thankful for Salvation When we experience God's salvation, He becomes our strength & our song, so that He gets all the glory (14-29).

A. God's salvation fills us with joy 14-15

Vs 14 is taken from the Song of Moses (Ex 15:2), sung by Israel after the Lord destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. All through the OT, the Exodus is looked back on as the supreme example of God saving His people. When you've relied on God to save you from your sin, He becomes your salvation, & also your strength & your song.

⁵ Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 3a, 104.

B. Our salvation glorifies God as we tell others (16-18) The psalmist exalts the Lord & His strength (His **right hand** 3x). As a result of God's deliverance, the psalmist vows to tell others **of the works of the Lord** (17). So should we. Although, on the surface, the psalmist's troubles stem from enemies trying to kill him, he attributes it ultimately to the Lord's discipline (18). John Calvin notes,

*The main thing in adversity is to know that we are laid low by the hand of God, & that this is the way which He takes to prove our allegiance, to arouse us from our torpidity (sluggishness), to crucify our old man, to purge us from our filthiness, to bring us into submission & subjection to God, & to excite us to meditate on the heavenly life.*³

As we submit to God's loving hand of discipline, He produces in us **the peaceful fruit of righteousness** (Heb 12:11). Whenever you allow your circumstances to dictate what you think about God, you diminish His greatness & your thanksgiving fades. As one singer has put it, *The days that I keep my gratitude higher than my expectations I have really good days.*⁴

C. Only the righteous may enter into true worship 19-20

The **gates of righteousness** are the gates of the temple. The joyous pilgrimage has arrived at Jerusalem. But to enter those gates, the worshiper needed to check his heart & make sure he was right before God. Only then could he truly worship the Lord. When we trust Christ as Savior, God clothes us with His righteousness, so that we may enter His holy presence. But we must also search our hearts to make sure that we aren't harboring known sin. Just before the author of Hebrews encourages us to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, he reminds us that God's Word judges the thoughts & intentions of our hearts, & that all things are open & laid bare to Him (Heb 4:12-13, 16). As we come before God in prayer & worship, we must make sure we come not in our own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ. The psalmist has shown that because salvation is our greatest need, God's lovingkindness should be our continual song. Because we don't naturally see salvation as our greatest need, the Lord puts us in situations so we'll cry out to Him to save us. When we experience His salvation, the Lord becomes our strength & song, so that He gets the glory. Finally, God's way of salvation confounds the world but causes His people to rejoice & give thanks to Him. The **stone** of vs 22 may refer to the nation Israel, whom the Babylonians

³ Calvin's Commentaries, on Ps. 118:18, p. 386

⁴ Ray Wylie Hubbard, *Mother Blues*

rejected & despised, yet who were the ones to bring the Savior into the world. Or it could refer to the king. For example, David was rejected by his brothers & hunted down by Saul but God finally exalted him to the throne. Some think it's the actual stone in the 2nd temple, at 1st set aside, but later used as the cornerstone. Whatever the background, Jesus clearly applied this to Himself. He was the stone rejected by the builders (the Jewish leaders), but who became the chief corner stone (Mt 21:42). They rejected & crucified Him, but God raised Him up & highly exalted Him, **so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow** (Phil 2:10). God's way of salvation is a stumbling block to the proud, but a source of great joy to God's people (1 Cor 1:18-31).

In vs 26 the psalmist gives a blessing to **the one who comes in the name of the Lord**. To come in the Lord's name is to come in His authority & power (10–12). The NT interprets this vs as messianic. It's Jesus who comes to us in God's name & who rolls back the kingdom of darkness (Mk 11:9).⁵ Notice that the rejection & exaltation of Jesus **is the Lord's doing** (23). God is the Author & Initiator of our salvation (Is 53:10; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). He must give us light (27) or we won't see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6). In vs 24, the day referred to isn't every day (although it's true that the Lord gives us every day), but rather the day of salvation, when the rejected stone became the chief cornerstone, the day Jesus entered Jerusalem with hosannas welcoming Him as Israel's Savior. If on that day human voices failed to **rejoice & be glad**, Jesus said that the very stones would cry out His praises (Lk 19:40). God's way of salvation requires the appropriate sacrifice on His altar (27). Jesus is God's complete & final sacrifice for our sins (Heb 10:1-14). Thus we should cry out to the Lord to save & prosper His people (25). Salvation is always individual. *You* must be able to say with the psalmist, **28**

The psalmist comes full circle & repeats vs 1. **29**

Vss 27–29 make 3 powerful statements about God & about our right relationship to Him.

1. The Lord is God (27) **Lord** is the name Jehovah or Yahweh, the God of the OT. Yahweh is the true God & He's revealed this to us by making His light shine on us.

⁵ Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 73–150*, vol. 14, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989), 338.

2. You are my God (28). This God is the psalmist's own personal God, not merely the God of Israel. Jehovah is his God, the One in whom he's placed his personal trust & to whom he's made a personal commitment. Therefore, we must ask, is this God my God?

3. The Lord ... is good (29). The psalmist calls on the people to thank God because this God **is good** in its fullest sense. The writer knew that God is good because God had been good to him. He'd been oppressed, but God had freed him from that. He'd been attacked, but God had delivered him from his enemies. He'd been about to fall, but God had raised him up & given him work to do, testifying to God's goodness. It's no different for those who've been saved by Jesus. We too have been freed from sin, delivered, & given work to do.⁶

James Boice tells of 3 Christian martyrs in France who relied on Ps 118 as they faced execution. Pastor Louis Rang was condemned to die in Grenoble in 1745. He was offered life if he'd renounce his faith, but he rejected the offer. He was led to the scaffold singing a French version of Ps 118:24, which might be translated, *Here now is the happy day for which we have been waiting. Sing praise to God who gives us joy & pleasures unabating.* A few weeks later, pastor Jacque Roger strengthened himself with this same vs. He was 70 years old & spent his last days in prison encouraging others to remain true to the faith. As he was led to his execution, he sang the same song that Rang had sung just weeks before. Francois Rochette, who died in 1762, 17 years after Rang & Roger, was offered freedom if he renounced his faith. He too refused. He also mounted the scaffold singing, *Here now is the happy day for which we have been waiting.*⁷ We may or may not face martyrdom for our faith, but we all face various trials. If you've experienced God's salvation through Jesus Christ, then you should be filled with joy & thanksgiving. You should be able to say, **28-29.**

A few words of application:

1) Rejoice that God is our God. It's a joy to have God as our God. Even as we are His, so He is ours. He hasn't withheld Himself from us but has freely given Himself to us in Jesus. As we consider the

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 107–150: An Expositional Commentary*, pp 967–968

⁷ Boice, p 963

salvation we have in Christ, we should rejoice that He is our God. What incredible privileges, blessings, & deliverance we have because Christ is our king & God!

2) Give thanks to Him for His salvation. Our salvation is completely underserved. God isn't obligated to reply to the hosannas, the cry of, *save us*, of people. Yet Jesus has saved us, even in our rebellion & sin, because He loves us. He washes us. He becomes the sacrifice for our deliverance & celebration. His mercy is underserved, & how wonderful it is to receive it. Therefore, thank Him for it.

3) Extol His steadfast love. We're to **extol** the Lord our God. The word **extol** is a beautiful but strange word to our ears. It isn't one we use often. To **extol** someone is to ascribe glory, worship, & honor to them with exuberant joy. We testify of the goodness of God & exalt Him for the world to see. We bear witness to Jesus & long for others to see His beauty & glory. Extolling isn't just a private act but a public one. We raise our voice before the world of the salvation of God found only through His Son. As we **extol** the value of the Lord, we bask in the light of the One who has come & shined upon us. In the glow of Christ's mercies, our hearts are warmed with love & joy.

Every Christian should give thanks to God in all things. We have every reason to be filled with gratitude as a result of God's abundant goodness toward us. We should be filled with thankfulness because God delivers us out of our trials. But most of all, God has delivered us from His own wrath through the blood of His Son. This is the greatest deliverance of all, a divine rescue of undeserving sinners from the final judgment & eternal damnation. Let us give thanks to the Lord for His great salvation through the cross. & this psalm certainly points to that very event.

This psalm contains the words that were sung to Jesus by multitudes when He entered Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover week, **Hosanna... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord** (Mt 21:9) That's right from this psalm. One of the things Jesus was mocked about was that, **He saved others; He cannot save Himself** (Mt 27:42). What does that have to do with anything? *Hosanna* means *save us*. He'd been acknowledged as the One blessed of the Lord who came to save & now He was being mocked as the One who claimed to come to save but couldn't even save Himself. Do you know why He couldn't save Himself? Because He was acting on our behalf. The

only way we could experience God's steadfast love was through the death of the only One who was truly righteous. Though those religious leaders didn't realize what they were saying when they mocked Him, they were speaking a profound truth. He couldn't save Himself because He was acting for us so we could receive His salvation that isn't conditioned by our faithfulness & righteousness, but by His faithfulness & righteousness.

The night of Jesus' arrest was the night of the Passover celebration with His disciples. It was during that Passover dinner, as Jesus held up the bread & the cup, that He connected His broken body & poured out blood to Passover itself. Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper & connects His upcoming death as the Passover Lamb, bearing the full penalty & weight of human sin in His sufferings. Mt 26:30 tells us that after dinner they sang a hymn. Which hymn did they sing? What was the final psalm sung in the Passover celebration? Ps 118. Jesus sings this psalm before heading to Gethsemane. He sings, **The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I will look *with satisfaction* on those who hate me (6-7).** Jesus called out in distress & was comforted by God to boldly face the cross. The cross brought anguish to Jesus from those who hated Him, so He sweats drops of blood & calls out to His Father, asking if it's possible that this cup would pass. Yet He's singing the psalm He came to fulfill. He is the One in distress who calls upon the Lord. As Jesus sings, He knows in a few hours, He'll be surrounded by His enemies who will hurl accusations & mock Him. He'll be surrounded like a swarm of bees, with each sting represented by the lash of the whip. Like a thorn set on fire, He knew His suffering would be intense, but the blaze will be extinguished. As Jesus endures the affliction of the cross, He does so knowing His Father won't abandon Him forever. He entrusted Himself to death because He knew His Father wouldn't ultimately forsake Him. In the name of the Father, the Son would cut off His foes in death & triumph over them in resurrection. Jesus' strength & song are found in God, who would save & vindicate Him. The right hand of the Lord would do valiantly as He exalts His suffering Servant & crowns Him with a name that's above every name. Through suffering, Jesus was exalted, & we were saved. As Jesus sings Ps 118 with His disciples, He sings with expectant hope & confidence in vs 17-18: **I will not die, but live, & tell of the works of the**

Lord. The Lord has disciplined me severely, but He has not given me over to death. For Jesus, the pathway to glory came through suffering. Through distress came victory. Through death came life. God's deliverance of His beloved Son from the throngs of death brings the triumph of resurrection & the coronation of His appointed King. Jesus' death & resurrection provides salvation for God's people. The steadfast love of God is displayed not only in His love for His Son & His deliverance by resurrection, but Jesus brings the salvation spurred by God's steadfast love to us. **24**

The gospel accounts of Palm Sunday & the Passion Week quote from Ps 118 in reference to Jesus. When He entered Jerusalem, the crowds cried out the words of vss 25-26 (Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9-10; Lk 19:39; Jn 12:13). **Do save** in Hebrew is *hosanna*. Later that week, as He debated with the Jewish leaders, Jesus referred to Himself as the stone which the builders rejected, which becomes the chief corner stone (Mt 21:42). Peter used vs 22 in preaching to the Jewish Sanhedrin after the resurrection. In Acts 4:11-12, after testifying that God had raised Jesus from the dead, Peter boldly proclaimed, **He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. & there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.** Peter also refers to this vs in 1 Pt 2:7. He goes on to speak about how we've been saved by God's mercy, **so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light** (1 Pt 2:9). Or, as Ps 118 says, **29**.