

Giving Thanks for God's Loyal Love

Seeing Christ in the Psalms

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Bible Text: Psalm 118

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As we continue our series **In Christ Alone** let me ask you a question about your past week...

How many days this past week would you say were characterized by Joy? How many days would you say, that was a day I rejoiced in.

How many of you would like to rejoice everyday, no matter the distress you might be in?

All of them right...I mean after all consider these verses...

***"This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it."* (Psalm 118:24)**

***"in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5:18)**

I think all of us want to have joy in our daily lives, all of us want to be thankful people, but how do we do that when in distress?

It is easy to have joy when it is a beautiful day and you have some great activities planned. It is easy to be thankful when you have lots of blessings to count.

But what about when you are in distress.

The Psalms were the Hymn book of Israel, to help them sing and worship the Lord, and cultivate a right view of God in blessings and in trials. And the nation of Israel was often in trials and distress...be it by their own doing and the Lord disciplining them to return to Him, or another nation attacking them and the Lord needing to deliver them.

Psalm 118 would have been a Psalm they used over and over, particularly to recall the Nation of Israel's deliverance from foreign enemies...especially from Egypt, particularly as they celebrate Passover, this would have been one of the last songs they would sing to commemorate God's rescue from Slavery from Egypt and defeat of the Strength of Pharaoh. Psalm 118 draws from Exodus Song of Moses.

Exodus 15:1-6 – right hand

"Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and said, "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. "The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. "The Lord is a warrior; The Lord is His name. "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. "The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone. "Your right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy." (Exodus 15:1-6)

They would have sang this song every Passover, and as they were in Babylonian or Assyrian Captivity their distress and need for deliverance would be ever before them and as they celebrate Passover in captivity they would sing of the goodness of the Lord.

As Ezra and Nehemiah prepared the people to return to Israel from captivity, they would have sang this song as they celebrate Passover.

They also sang elements of this Psalm when they laid the foundation of the temple after Ezra led them from captivity.

Ezra 3:10-11

“Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, “For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.” (Ezra 3:10–11)

Jeremiah records that singing will one day return to desolate Jerusalem

Jeremiah 33:10–11

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Yet again there will be heard in this place, of which you say, “It is a waste, without man and without beast,” that is, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, For the Lord is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting”; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first,’ says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 33:10–11)

Psalm 118 was Martin Luther’s favorite Psalm (500 year ann of Prot. Ref) :

Luther said, “This is my own beloved psalm. Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, I fell in love with this psalm especially. Therefore I call it my own. When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even saints could not aid me, this psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles. As a result, it is dearer to me than all the wealth, honor, and power of the pope, the Turk, and the emperor. I would be most unwilling to trade this psalm for all of it.”

So How about us...How can we rejoice in the Lord when we are distressed and it seems like no one can help us...well if Israel can rejoice in the national deliverance that God provided over and over again...surely we can rejoice in the eternal deliverance Christ provided once for all.

As we continue our series of seeing **Christ in the Psalms**

...lets walk through this Psalm and consider how it helps God’s people cultivate a heart of thankfulness and rejoicing that ultimately can only be found in Christ alone.

Please open your bibles to Psalm 118. This is on page 444 in the back section of the bible under the seat in front of you.

I am going to walk through the text a section at a time as we look at....

4 Reasons to Rejoice in the Lord’s goodness when you are distressed

Let's look at the first point

1. The Lord's covenant love for you never stops (v1-4)

God is love, that is a familiar phrase. We also say things like We love Pizza. There is a difference between the love God has for His people, and the Love we have for deep dish or meat lovers.

God's love is also different than the love we have for our friends and family until they wrong us.

God's love is based on a covenant, a bond, a committed love. A loyal love, a faithful love that comes from His good character, not from how much the recipients of His love deserve it.

The word translated loving kindness is also translated steadfast love in some translations...but the original word is Hebrew is 'Chesed' and it was the word used to define God's relationship with the people He rescued by His mighty right hand and made a covenant with.

God made a covenant with His people Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai, and the core of that covenant was the goodness of God...His covenant love.

Ex 34:5-6 – lovingkindness

“The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;” (Exodus 34:5–6)

After this covenant He instructed His people how to sacrifice, how to recognize this covenant that Lord has made with them by offering animal sacrifices, particularly each year on Passover.

He calls Israel, the house of Aaron, everyone who fears the Lord to give thanks for God's covenantal love. It is repeated 4 times each time reaffirming the goodness of God.

Now we will get to this more in a bit, but the point is God faithful to His covenant, to love His people on the basis of the the covenant. That convenent was focused on the blood of animals. How much more assurance of God's covenantal love for us do we have, since we are under the new covenant of Christ's blood.

His love is everlasting. His love for you never stops. That means God's love is not on a barter system. And if you don't have the goods, His love for you stops. His love for you is based on a covenant, sealed in Christ' blood.

That is why we give thanks to the Lord, for His is good and His loving kindness is everlasting.

If that is all there were, that would be plenty of reason to sing, but there are more reasons to rejoice in the goodness of God even when we are in distress...

2. The Lord is a trustworthy refuge where you can find help (v5-13)

If you can't swim, it is great to have a lifeguard. If you get stuck in a ditch, anyone with a truck is your best friend, if you are in the middle of a terrorist attack like in the UK recently, all you want to get to is a safe place.

Where should God's people find help, find refuge...in their God... the one who rescued them.

This is something all Israel would sing, so when they individually say I called upon the Lord, it was really a corporate focus that when the nation was in trouble they would call upon the name of the Lord. We praise the Lord and thank him for his blessings, but we also must call upon the Lord in our distress. That is what Israel did when the new king of Egypt enslaved them.

Ex 2:23-24

“Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Exodus 2:23–24)

The Psalm remembers that the Lord answered their cry, and set them in a large place.

The point here is when you are enslaved, the walls close in on you, you are confined, you are not allowed to leave. Whereas the Lord brings them out of Egypt and provides them land, seed and blessing...so they had a large place in comparison to slavery in Egypt.

The Psalmist says the Lord is for me, I will not fear, what can man do to me.

The Author of Hebrews says the same thing in Heb 13:6

“so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”” (Hebrews 13:6)

You have to understand this is sung as they remember and are often faced with the nation being destroyed. There were real fears.

But those fears are put into perspective when we sing that the Lord is for us, he is our help, he is our refuge.

Even if man were to kill me, the Lord is for me...and he has the power over life and death, and he can restore my life.

“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 and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

The Lord is able to take those who are in distress and looked down upon and exult them so that they look down upon those who seek to destroy them.

But the key here is what you trust in. You see these songs are not just to pass the time or make us feel good...it is to reinforce where our trust needs to be.

It is better to trust the Lord than man...even if that man is a prince with an army, a treasury, chariots, snipers, Blackhawk helicopters, B2 bombers and tanks.

There was a constant temptation for Israel to be like the nations around them and to find security in making treaties with nations around them.

In this case all the nations surround me and are not allies. If you read in Ps 117 it says that all the nations are to join Israel in exulting the Lord, but in fact in Psalm 118 they surround Israel to destroy.

But in the name of the Lord they will be cut off. The psalmist repeats that 3x...there is some repetition in songs to highlight important parts that need to be emphasized.

“In the name of the Lord” is emphasized.

They are going to be victorious, not because of how strong they are, but based on who is on their side. This reminds me of David.

1 Sam 17:45-47

“Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. “This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in

Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands.'" (1 Samuel 17:45–47)

Now there is no doubt that David was well practiced with a sling, but the point is his trust is in the Lord, he is fighting in the name of the Lord, the battle is the Lord's and God will give Goliath into His hand so that all will know that there is a God in Israel.

So the victory is ultimately the Lord's and David is courageous, but his courage comes from his trust in the Lord.

The Psalm says, Even though enemies may surround them like bees...they will burn up like a bush in the desert. (Bushes in the desert don't burn very long).

- Except the burning bush ...that's different...

The point is...When one's trust is in the Lord, a swarm of opposition is nothing more than kindling.

That does not mean it will not be difficult, the text says, "you pushed me violently...you smashed me to the ground, but the Lord helped me."

- This song does not mean there will be no distress for those who bear the name of the Lord, quite the opposite, but it does mean there is a refuge and help.

As a pastor, I need to ask you...Where is your help?

Where do you turn to when life gets difficult? Is it to the Lord, or is it something else... like entertainment as an escape, Facebook to post your distress so people's comments will comfort you, maybe it is worry... thinking you can in your strength figure out a solution, or maybe some sort of substance to try to ease the feeling of being overwhelmed.

I think sometimes we don't want to cry out to the Lord for help and to be our refuge...because we don't want to need a refuge...we often want ease and comfort and no opposition. But it is really important for God's people to expect distress and be ready to cry out to the Lord.

The Psalmist wants God's people to understand that God is a better refuge than anything else. Rejoice, for the Lord is ready to answer you as you call out to Him.

He will not keep all distress from you, but he will help you through it so that people around you will know the name of the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord, for His is good and His loving kindness is everlasting.

We are to rejoice over God's loyal love, and that he is for us, he will help us, and he is a refuge we can trust in ...that is because of His great strength and His great salvation.

The third reason to rejoice is...

3. The Lord's strength provides salvation (v14-21)

This section opens and closes with "The Lord has become my salvation".

Salvation is the word used to describe rescue and deliverance from enslavement and distress.

What we have been saying is that the Lord is faithful to His covenant, and he will help his people, and not only is he willing, but He is able to help.

It is great to have a big brother, if some kids want to beat you up, but you can go get your big brother, that is a great resource to have....unless your big brother is shorter than you. I am glad you love me bro and you will fight with me, but I think we should run.

"The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him." (Exodus 15:2)

As a pastor I want to ask you, what do you boast in, what is your strength? What do you want people to recognize you for...is it your relationship with the Lord...The Lord is my strength and my song. I will tell of the works of the Lord.

The song emphasizes God's mighty right Hand...This is military terminology, but there is more going on than just physical rescue or salvation from physical oppression.

We start to see how this song reminds God's people of the past deliverance, but also positions them to consider future deliverance.

There is joyful shouting in the tents of the righteous. So there is a focus on Righteousness, not just defeating the surrounding nations, but about God's people being characterized by righteousness, not simply safety.

Notice the in v17 the psalmist says I will not die but live, and tell of the works of the lord.

This is saying I trust the Lord with my very life...even if nations surround me.

And even if the Lord is disciplining me, and I have not died...I will tell of the works of the Lord.

Notice the contrast in vs 19 – open to me the gates of righteousness. I have not died, I am not separated from the Lord who is my refuge, my salvation...rather I trust the strength of the Lord who can open for me the gates of righteousness..

This is the gate of the Lord, he is the one who provides righteousness and can open a way for me to be with Him.

The psalmist highlights how the nation cried out to God and he answered them in their physical slavery, but his salvation is not just being delivered from something terrible, but entering into something wonderful... to enter into His gate, to be with him in the tent of the righteous, to experience ultimate salvation and eternal life rather than eternal death.

How is he going to do that...well he is going to do it in a marvelous way. In a way where His people are in awe and rejoice in How good God is, even in suffering.

Our 4th reasons to rejoice is...

4. The Lord works through suffering to bring about blessing (v22-29)

The stone that the builder rejected has become the chief corner stone.

A cornerstone would be a large rock, cut from a rock quarry that is so straight, and so strong that the whole building can be built around it. Now the builders, the ones who should know what a good cornerstone should look like, are to reject it, but in fact because the lord is the one doing this, that rock that is rejected will actually become the chief cornerstone, the reason for God's people to rejoice and marvel at the goodness of our God.

Don't miss what is marvelous...it is not just that the cornerstone is good...but that it was rejected and became the chief cornerstone. That is what is marvelous. That is the Lord's doing.

You and I would not plan it out this way. OK, let's develop a plan that everyone rejects, and that will then be shown to be the best plan. We would not do that, but we can marvel at it and rejoice in it.

God in His strength and power can take someone that everyone rejects to be the person that supports everything. God can use suffering to bring about blessing.

That is exactly what He did in Christ.

Jesus said

"Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?" (Matthew 21:42, NASB95)

The context of Jesus quoting Psalm 118 in Matthew 21:42 is a parable of a vineyard.

And the vineyard owner plants a vineyard and hires some vine growers to take care of it. He then sends some servants for the harvest and the people he has hired beats and kills some of his savants. Then the owner sends his son, and they kill him thinking they will get the vineyard for themselves since the heir is dead.

Jesus quotes psalm 118 to foreshadow that he will be rejected, beaten and killed...but the amazing thing is this is part of the Lord's plan to bring salvation so that those who trust in Him would be able to enter His gates.

Vs 24 says This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Can you imagine singing that with Jesus after celebrating the Passover in the upper room, and right before the soldiers came to take him away to be killed.

Let us rejoice in the Lord, he is good...even if the day the Lord has made involves suffering that will bring about eternal blessing.

One of my prayers is that the goodness of God will become extremely robust to you...and that God's goodness is not just tied to a day everything goes well...but that you would affirm God's goodness in suffering because you trust His plan of salvation.

Have you trusted God's plan of salvation yet?

The Psalmist says, I shall give thanks to you for you have answered me, and YOU have become my salvation. Have you said that. Have you admitted your need for the Lord in His strength to save you.

Is Jesus the chief cornerstone your cornerstone...that only thing that can give you stability and allow you to enter the gates of the righteous.

If not, I would encourage you to ask the lord to save you based on the death, burial resurrection of Christ...today.

Peter the apostle said, right after he referred to Christ as the Chief cornerstone in Acts 4:12,

"And 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." (Acts 4:12)

The Psalmist continues to cry out to God, O Lord do save, we beseech you O Lord send prosperity. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

This is what the people cried out when Jesus entered Jerusalem

“The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”” (Matthew 21:9, NASB95)

They would be celebrating the feast of tabernacles or booths, where they construct little shacks or booths of foliage, and they would celebrate with palm branches, celebrating the Lord provision.

“took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”” (John 12:13, NASB95)

Notice that blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord...earlier in the psalm In the name of the Lord is indicative of someone who defeats their enemies in the name of the Lord, because they trust the Lord even when surrounded.

Now we Have Christ entering the city. The people would have seen him as God’s provision of the right hand of the Lord, the one who can cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, feed an army with just a few loaves of bread and some fish, someone who would cut off all their enemies, especially the oppression and distress of Rome.

Jesus came to defeat a bigger enemy than Rome – sin and death

To do that... Jesus is trusting in the salvation plan of God...he is coming in the name of the Lord.

But He is on a donkey not a war horse. The prophet Zechariah predicted this.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; And the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah 9:9–10)

You see Jesus entered on a donkey, not a chariot and war horse. He entered on an animal of peace.

...and this path of palm branches is leading right up to the festival sacrifice.

He came to offer his life as a sacrifice to make peace between God and man...so His salvation and peace would be for all the nations.

The cornerstone is rejected, and the messiah will be killed.

He came to be rejected and die, so that you and I and all those who fear the lord and call upon Him for salvation can enter the gate of the Lord and be in His presence forever.

Give thanks to the Lord, for His is good and His loving kindness is everlasting.

If the nation of Israel could since this song in celebration of the deliverance as a nation against it’s enemies, we must all the more rejoice in the goodness of God who is able to make peace between God and man through Christ alone...the chief cornerstone, the festival sacrifice.

Take always.

- Choose to give thanks to the Lord each Day because you trust His good plan of salvation, not simply because of your circumstances.
- Be careful where you seek refuge...do not ultimately trust in man, do not trust in yourself, Trust in the Lord when you are distressed. Call out to Him.
- Boat in the Lord’s strength. Seek to step out in faith in the Lord’s name...not to defeat people, but to share the plan of salvation with them.
- Rejoice in Christ, knowing that his suffering was and is part of God’s plan and the means by which you can dwell in the tent of the righteous and enter the gate of the Lord.

This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Rejoice in all things. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Let’s pray.