

Palm Sunday, Psalm 118

Psalm 118 is a proclamation of thanksgiving, given on the heels of a tremendous dark period in a person's life. The reason we are reading this particular Psalm today is because it is quoted by the masses when Jesus enters Jerusalem. We're in a bit of a bind, because the Psalm itself is really interesting, but we're in a mini-series leading toward Easter. I just happen to have been teaching on the Passion week in YG for the past 3 months, so that's really fresh in my mind, and also this Psalm is quoted multiple times over a three day period.

You might be aware that Jesus quoted often from the Psalms. In fact, it's the book that he quotes the most, followed by Deut, Isa, and Exodus. This shows us that Jesus meditated often on these scriptures, probably had huge chunks literally memorized. After all the teachers of the Law were amazed at his ability to wield the scriptures at 12 years old. So like we do, He used the Psalms to feed himself spiritually, and quoted individual lines. But Jesus often took the Psalms one step further. He found them not just to convey a spiritual principle that he could latch on to, but implied that many of the Psalms were unique to Him and His story. He sees something that happens in His life and quotes the line of a Psalm.

1. When Jesus dipped the bread into the bowl and says, "One of the twelve will betray me" he mentions in passing "just as it is written!" He was most likely referring to Psalm 41:9, "Even my close friend, in whom I had trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me!"
2. In the upper room, after Judas leaves, Jesus talks about the works that he did among the Jews. He says that they hated him and his father, and he quotes from Psalm 35:19 and 69:4, "They hated me without cause!"
3. In front of Pilate he says, "From now on you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power," which is directly from Psalm 110, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool at my feet."
4. No Psalm probably conveys more the anguish of Jesus on the cross than Psalm 22. The soldiers divided his only earthly belongings, his strength is dried up and his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth.

"These are my words that I spoke while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." He says that after He is risen, and He had been saying that during His ministry.

So, in the Psalms we find not only the depth of the human soul that feeds us at any age, but specifically a Christological depth to the Messiah's work, the Messiah's experience, and the Messiah's soul. Some have called the more Messianic Psalms, "the prayers of Jesus."

Let's start with looking at the Psalm in its basic literary context. If the book of Psalms was Israel's prayer book, different sections within the Psalms were used for specific purposes. Psalms 113-118 is today, and has been for a long time, a unit called the Psalms of Hallel. Hallel is the Hebrew word for praise. You know this word in Halleluia. [Key] These Psalms focus on God's deliverance from oppression (Passover/Exodus themes). The Psalms of Hallel were used back then, as they are today, during the feasts that would draw Pilgrims to Jerusalem. Namely the largest one, Passover. The contents of this particular Psalm describe a festal procession to the sanctuary to sacrifice to and praise the Lord. These Hallel Psalms, were sung during the approach to Jerusalem, and the Passover meal.

No author is mentioned, and there is no context, so it sits beautifully timeless. It's meant to sit timeless so that any individual worshipper can give testimony to the Lord's goodness for His deliverance.

I want you to notice that he starts and ends with the exact same words. "Oh Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" [Plug for those who have been to Israel, you undoubtedly learned and love the song *hodu L'adonai ki tov, ki LeOlam Chasdo!* These are the words. Natalie Boston will come home in a few weeks knowing this song :-)] This thought frames the entire thought. "God is GOOD, for His longsuffering, his steadfast love, his enduring patience, His *hesed* never ceases. And The Psalmist says, "let all of Israel say it, let all the priests say it, let anyone who fears the Lord (who has submitted their life to him) say it." **Read 2-4**

Can we imagine someone who is going to the Temple, to offer sacrifice and proclaim the goodness of God among the people and in His presence? With the imagery of precession, it's easy to envision the Pilgrims singing this on their way to the Passover feast.

But just because God is good, doesn't mean that we won't experience very hard and dark periods in our lives. In fact this rejoicing is set on the heels of a very dark time in his life. If you've ever experienced, or maybe are experiencing now, a really dark and oppressive time in your life, this Psalm might speak to you. **Read V.5**, "Out of my distress I called to the Lord..." Most of the times we don't know the details, but in this case he tells us the details.

"All the nations surrounded me, in the name of YHWH I cut them off." I could envision this being an individual Israelite king. Is this a different leader, or could this also represent Israel corporately in the Exodus themes.

He felt surrounded, like a trapped small animal backed in a corner. Anyone ever felt unable to move? All your options are blocked in some way? **They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!** That thought of feeling surrounded and oppressed, whether by a physical enemy or a problem or relationship gone bad is one that we will feel at times. Notice how the name of YHWH is the source of relief. It was His name that gave me victory. As believers, when life begins the chokehold, is it the "name of the LORD," that becomes our banner, shield and sword.

I can't help but put a plug in for moms with young children. The more children, the more applicable. **"They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; they surrounded me like bees."** You're thinking this is the verse of the year! His problems grew so fast it was like the raging crackling fire that raged through a pile of brush and thorns, instantly enormous.

Again the emphasis, on the power that is in the name of YHWH. We can be out looking for all these answers, when at times God wants us to simply refocus and whisper, "In your name, in the power of your name, grant me victory over this sin, grant me victory over this nightmare, in your name I pray for victory. In the name of our God!"

V.13 "I was pushed hard so that I was falling..."

There's always that teetering moment where you really wonder, "Is He really there? Does the Lord care about me? Does He really care about *my* situation?" And that's where we need these Psalms to refuel our souls. **"...but the Lord helped me."** Countless have gone before us and have endured hardships

from time forever past, and those who have held on to the name of YHWH, have seen Him answer and have seen His deliverance. **V.5, “the Lord answered me and set me free!”**

Remember our Pilgrim who is going up to Jerusalem. He begins explodes in praise.

Read 6-9; 14-17

With passion as he bangs on the doors, “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord, this is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

V.26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, we bless you from the house of the LORD. You can imagine the pilgrim coming to the house of God, and he says, “Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!” Put the animal on the altar we are here to praise you Lord!

END - On the other side of his personal darkness, came glory to God, and he wraps up the Psalm with the same words he started with, “Oh Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever!”

[Jesus to Jerusalem](#)

Can you picture the pilgrims singing them by rote, decade after decade, century after century? Each century the crowds grew bigger so that by the time of the NT, 250,000 Passover lambs were slaughtered. If you figure one lamb for a family of 10, that’s 2 million in Jerusalem.

And one Passover, Jesus comes discreetly to Jerusalem, mingled in the crowds, but not with his sacrifice, like everyone else, but as the sacrifice. I can't help but wonder if that particular year, with the people singing and dancing, he didn't reflect a little more heavily on v. 27, "bind up the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar.

When Jesus crests the hill just pass Bethany, seated on the foal of a Donkey, a huge crowd surrounds Him. These are people from Jerusalem, Galilee, and Bethany.

[Triumphal entry](#)

The crowd begins to chant from this Psalm 118:25-26, interjecting Messianic titles. They call him a king (Luke), and the Son of David (Matt), and use the Greek word “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

We just sang a song that had this word, so let’s look at it a little closer.

HOSANNA The Hebrew words me save me. This is what you’d say when you were rock climbing and you start to fall backwards, “Save me!” The term is only found right here in the OT. The Greek writers transliterated, just like the English authors did. But notice the shift in meaning over the course of the centuries. When we say hosanna we aren’t saying “save me!” We’re exclaiming praise, “Salvation has come to me!” Someone stuck our there hand and pulled me up. In Psalm 118, the cry for help is surrounded by shouts of proclamation that God has saved and delivered him, and over time the normal word became a technical word, a shout of hope, and exclamation of Salvation! By the time the Jews are shouting Hosanna, it’s not that they are exclaiming “save us” but more that they are yelling, hurry our deliver is here!

This all sounds wonderful, and I don't doubt their excitement and sincerity in the moment. Yes they understood that a king was suppose to come, but did they really want to receive what *he* was offering, on His terms... or did they want to receive Him for what they thought He would bring? Deliverance from oppression, a nationalistic kingdom that would have power and contend with other world powers, and finally bring peace into the Land. It was beautiful and this is what should have happened when Jesus came to Jerusalem as the predicted king. But as sincere as their excitement was, it was misguided and shallow excitement.

One commentator, Thomas: "The people's understanding of his mission was only partial, however. They grasped its political significance, namely the deliverance from foreign oppression, but failed to catch the spiritual requirements of his kingdom. Therefore the national aspirations of their generation were doomed to disappointment."

This failure brought grief to Jesus, even in His hour of great public acclamation (Luk 19:41).

So in the midst of the incredible parade, and crowds lining the streets and excitement of quoting the Psalms, if you looked close enough, you could possibly see tear streaks in the coarseness of his beard.

They used the verse and they got it right, but they didn't understand the implications of what Jesus was offering. If I'm your king, will learn what it means to enter the kingdom of righteousness?

The children

The second time Psalm 118 is alluded to in Passion week is when the Children then pick up the refrain that they heard the adults singing the day before. If we look at Mark's account, we see that Jesus makes it to the Temple that day, but the procession must have been slow and he looks around and makes a mental note of how mistreated God's Temple is. The next day He comes back to the Temple and clears it out. Everyone is driven out except for the blind the lame and the children. As soon as it goes quiet, the blind and lame start to shuffle toward Him, and Jesus heals them.

"Hoshiya-na" has become "Hosanna to the Son of David!" And we saw last week the quotation from Psalm 8, Out of the mouth of infants and babes you have prepared praise!"

The Jews

The third day, Jesus picks up Psalm 118 again. Now it's Tuesday, Jesus returns to the Temple and is viciously attacked by the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees... This is his longest day of battle, and though he silences every scholar that comes to him, this only feeds their hate toward Him. Groups that are normally enemies, have banded together to silence him, and they can't. They are seething to kill him, but they can't because the crowds love Him.

Jesus gives a parable about a master who planted a vineyard and went away. When the master sent messengers back to the vineyard to collect some fruit, the tenants beat the messengers and killed them. Finally he sent the son, surely they will listen to him, and they beat him and killed. Jesus quotes right out of Psalm 118 again. Everyone had been exclaiming "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," but Jesus gives somewhat of a scathing remark, "Have you never read the whole thing? What about the verse right before? The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." At this point, by Tuesday afternoon, Jesus can see in their eyes the hatred. He hasn't run from them, He's never hurt them, He's never taken a single thing from anyone, and He's never done anything but heal people and uphold the righteousness of God. And all of that just exposed their wickedness. And they

hated him more. There was no longer any excuse. The religious leaders, those that should have welcomed the Messiah, had been fully exposed to everything he represented, and they didn't want any part of it. They wanted their man-made religion, because that made them feel righteous, but they didn't want to humble themselves to God and receive His son. The prophets had been sent of old and they had been murdered. And now they were about to murder the son. Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits." He says that to the Jews, and opens the door wide to you and me, and all the Gentiles.

The stone that the builders rejected represents the crucified Jesus. The stone that has become the cornerstone (capstone) is the resurrected Jesus who heals and binds all men to God.

Heading out of Jerusalem

And Jesus quotes from Psalm 118 yet another time at the very end of the day. He spends all day slamming the scribes and the Pharisees, "you who sit on the seat of Moses and tie up heavy burdens on people that you don't even carry, with your phylacteries and holier than thou attitudes..." Jesus is about to leave the Temple for the very last time. He will never enter it again. It's evening on Tuesday night, he's got to be exhausted after that day, I don't know who's with him at this point, but look at the last words before He leaves Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, *and you would not!* See your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

He uses Psalm 118 again, but this time as a huge Messianic prophecy of Christ's return. You see the triumphal acclaim Jesus received from the Jews was like the lighting of a match. It flamed up and went out just as fast. But, the story of Jesus is a story of triumph that is still not finished. The story of Jesus and the Jewish nation is still not finished. In God's amazing story, Jesus will return again in triumph and power to the accolades of those who have been waiting for him for Millennia. This time the crowds will be gathered from all nations. This time there will be no humiliation, there will be no moments of grief, for he will be surrounded by the armies of heaven, and hailed by those redeemed from every tribe, tongue and nation who have been waiting for Him. But the best part is that the Jews will recognize him them. If you read Zech 12:10, there will be a true mourning in Jerusalem as they look "on me, the one whom they have pierced..." They will joyfully call him by the name that is on his robe and on his thigh, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

But before that Day could come Jesus had to endure the agony of what He had come for. I want to go back and look at Psalm 118 one more time from the darkness of Gethsemane. Jesus has been betrayed of Judas, he will be denied by Peter, and is being failed by His disciples who are asleep. Suddenly Psalm 118 reads like Jesus' closest prayer.

- "Out of my distress I called on the Lord...
- All nations surrounded me, they surrounded me, surrounded me on every side. They surrounded me like bees, like a fire among thorns (The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes, soon the romans, Pilate, Herod, the taunting guards)... in the name of the Lord I cut them off. It's God's name that gives power.
- I was pushed hard so that I was falling but the Lord helped me.
- The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.

- What can man do to me? (Pilate, you have no power other than what was given to you of God)
- The Lord is on my side as my helper; Jesus is crying out to God, can you let this next step pass me? All things are possible for you, can you take it?
- It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.
- The Lord is my strength and my song.
- Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter. The cross was the gate of righteousness.
- This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. The cross is the gate of God's righteousness.
- I thank you that you have answered me and become my salvation. The answer is you must drink this cup.
- The stone that the builders rejected is the cornerstone. This is marvelous in our eyes
- Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar

Within hours Jesus would be bound up on the cross, and cry "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"