

Psalm 118

This psalm starts out like a large group event. The microphone is getting passed around. Each person or group is enthusiastically telling us about what God has done for them.

We lose our composure because our plans start to look shaky. God is in the process of converting us from *spiritual cowards* into *mighty men of valor*. We can believe anything about ourselves until we are faced with a situation. God transformed Gideon into a warrior; though outwardly he and his neighbors had known him as a fearful man. The ironic thing is that we have to be essentially defeated and overwhelmed and faced with challenges to gain confidence in God. This psalm, like most psalms, has a pattern of starting with fear and impending doom..and ending in victory. Part of this transformation is *the LORD becoming our salvation*.

Read Psalm 118:1-4: We need to keep an *inventory and diary of blessings* and communicate them publicly. We need to savor them and rehearse them.

This psalm is like a national cheer or a lead up to a public coronation of Jesus. It begins with a two-part cheer. The word here or *thanksgiving* recorded in the first four verses is ‘yahah’ (H3034). It means to stretch or thrust out your hands as if you are throwing something (like a stone). It is also an act of reverence by raising your hands in surrender and humility. It all means to thankfully sing. American churches are not especially demonstrative in their worship. In America, church services are more mental, with some level of adoration. In the middle east they are loud and obvious and less concerned about *making a scene*. The only comparison of this type of praise in America is what you might see at a college football game. People cheer in unison with their arms lifted up to celebrate a touchdown.

I remember when the San Diego Chargers made a playoff victory years ago. It was an out of town game. My wife and I jumped into the car; and drove down to the stadium, with thousands of other Charger fans. We could not park close to the stadium. We parked about a quarter mile away; and we ran across restaurant parking lots, through trees and areas around the San Diego River, and all charged into the stadium. The team was simultaneously showing up. We were all yelling and cheering and totally excited. Junior Seau was further stoking the crowd with his excitement on the microphone. As I sat there enjoying the moment I was struck that we do not get this crazy about worshiping God. Why could we not praise God like we were praising our football team?

This two part cheer could be similar with one guy on the microphone yelling: “*Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!*” And the crowd responding in an overwhelming cheer: “*For His mercy endures forever!*” The closest thing to this that I have seen was at one of the Promise Keeper mens gatherings in Orange County. It was the first time that I had seen 60,000 men singing to God at the top of their voices with arms raised and tears in their eyes.

Read Psalm 118: 5-7: We need to draw positive conclusions about God in our present circumstances, from our past deliverances. God is allowing threats and setbacks to affect the psalmist. God is showing the psalmist his power and intention by physically rescuing him. More importantly, God is creating a better expectation for the believer. **Our expectation of deliverance improves with each rescue.** Here the psalmist still has ongoing problems, but his expected outcome is completely different. He is pumped up, and essentially saying: ‘Bring it on!’.

In the 1950s, a Johns Hopkins professor conducted a famous experiment. Curtis Richter oversaw a psychology experiment testing rats and their will to survive when subjected to the possibility of drowning. Domesticated and wild rats were placed into buckets of water. They all drowned after **two minutes** or so of treading water without hope of rescue. One rat was rescued just before going under. That rat recovered and was eventually re-introduced into a bucket of water later on. He swam for **hours!!** Though many considered this testing cruel, it taught us much about perseverance and hope in difficult situations. Richter hypothesized that introducing hope to rats would increase their survival times. He was right. Richter chose a few rats that were similar in build and placed them in buckets of water. He observed their behavior and plucked them out only at the point of drowning. After saving their lives, he dried them off, held them for a while, and then started the process over again. When the rats were placed in the bucket for a second time, they could swim much longer than they did the first time. Why? Because they had hope that they would be rescued again. I guess you could literally say, *Hope Floats*.

I went through a series of physical, financial and emotional setbacks a number of years ago. I had gotten to the point where I knew that God loved me; but I only expected evil tidings. That was largely because my days were filled with nothing but bad news and failures all around me. I was experiencing overwhelming business setbacks, as well as

personal financial hardships. I had prayed to God about fixing the problems. I angrily told God that I had asked him about all of these plans ahead of time. He did not wave me off. This went on for a while without change. One day, I prayed that God would help me at least enjoy my life instead of being strapped to this *treadmill* and *mild form of torture*. In that moment God changed my outlook; and my health began to rebound. Like this psalmist, nothing outwardly had changed, but my hope was now in God.

Read Psalm 118:8-9: Part of Christian maturity is to disregard the many ways that people have let us down. How do we become disillusioned in people? *“I thought that he was a trusted brother!” “I thought that we had a deal!”*, *“That guy sold me down the river!”*, *“I feel like a fool for falling for that pack of lies!”*. What about our disappointments in our leaders? *“My boss is wasting my time”*, *“Our public officials do not represent my interest at all!”*, It is easy to *pick off* our brothers and our leaders as falling way short of our expectations. Paul warned us severely about this trap. He instructed us to *play for the benefit of the team*; and do not look too close at any brother. We will always be underwhelmed when you break out a magnifying glass to look at others. We are not good role models ourselves either. In fact, we are frequently walking contradictions. Sometimes we are the antithesis of what we advocate.

*Therefore, from now on, **we regard no one according to the flesh**. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:16-19)*

We mistakenly confuse who they are versus whose they are.

But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. (John 2:24-25)

It is better to look towards what we can do for someone, than to look forward to something that they can do for us.

Read Psalm 118: 10-15: The psalmist has suddenly transformed into a *super-saint*. He is not afraid of anything, because he knows that God is with him. I recall when our

daughter went off to college. Her plans were to attend a Christian college at first. Then she saw that Santa Barbara City college appeared to have a great acting program. We changed our compass setting, and set forth to start there. She quickly found herself as a fish out of water. She felt like she had really blown it badly. There was no detectable faith on campus or in the staff. In fact, her faith was ridiculed at every turn. A number of her classes seemed to be devoted to marginalizing and ridiculing Christianity. She found herself to be a bit of a laughingstock. She had a philosophy class that actually studied the bible to disprove God! She was quickly isolated as the only believer in class, and was picked on over and over publicly. One day a question came up; and once again she was on the spot. Her reply was that “*you need to be born again to be saved*”. The classroom roared with laughter; but a funny thing happened. In that moment she stopped becoming a *shrinking violet*. She felt suddenly like superwoman as the Holy Spirit coursed through her being. In that moment she felt sorry for them; but she was now the one on top. The *spirit of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah* filled her. From that day on, she was used to rescue doubting and bullied christians for years to come. She went on to be a campus christian ministry leader; and she has been living in victory helping countless souls make it through this experience.

Apparently my grandfather was known to say that all that you have in life is an attitude. That saying makes more sense, the further I walk with Christ. Are my challenges going to own me and stress me out; or am I looking forward to seeing what God will do next?

Read Psalm 118: 16-21: These are the words of the victorious life in Christ. We can be saved but still live in perpetual defeat. It is like we are heaven bound; but are somehow convinced that we are defeated in our daily lives. Many psalms begin with a cry for help; and they end in a victory celebration. Only God can turn around a life with such extremes. God is always saving us from something. We are very slow to let go of things; and grab ahold of God.

In Revelation chapters 2-3 there are 7 letters written to 7 churches. They are essentially report cards and needed direction. They might represent all believers in one way or another. They all essentially are called to become *overcomers*. That means different things to different people. Here are the 7 messages given to these churches necessary to become overcomers:

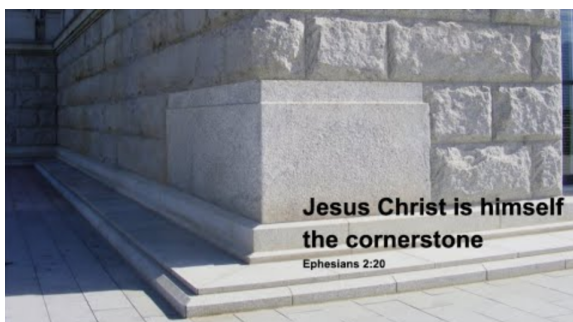
- Repent and return to the first love that you had for God. You have become like an unfeeling religious robot.
- Be faithful in the face of those who hate God; and are coming after you.

- Stay away from false doctrines and unscriptural conjecture. Get more serious about your scriptural intake. The sexual sin always accompanies compromised doctrine. Adultery and idolatry always have a connection. Stay away from exclusivism in the church. Don't try to be *a somebody*.
- Stay away from the captivating woman pastor who is luring you into sin.
- Wake up! Start walking with God, and produce good works. You are squandering your time on earth.
- Enter through the *open door of opportunity* that the Holy Spirit is providing. This is a limited time offer. Don't just stand there and think about it. Procrastination is equal to rejection.
- Face the music for your spiritual laziness and sense of entitlement. Walk before me as a servant.

Read Psalm 118:22-29: This part is about Jesus in his living temple. He is the cornerstone of the church. That means that he provides the template and layout for the whole structure. Man has thrown away the blueprints and tried to build something else. Jesus was rejected by his people (the Jews). They tried to build worship on men's righteousness instead of the righteousness of Christ.

A cornerstone sets the horizontal and vertical controls for a building. It is where all the lines of structural direction (including vertical) come together. God has a *plumb line* dropping straight down from heaven that points straight up; which is righteousness. The ways of mercy and the ways of truth are like different horizontal planes that meet at the cornerstone of Christ.

Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, And righteousness shall look down from heaven. Psalm 85:9-11)



The cornerstone is an appropriate image; since we are each compared to *living stones* that come together and stand side by side and we also stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:4-6)

We tend to think of *a temple* as a building; but it’s more about all of us surrounding Jesus.

These verses reoccured in Jerusalem during the triumphant entry.

Hosannah is the same phrase meaning “*save us now*”, and is what was repeated centuries later at the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem. *Save us* is essentially what *Jesus* means (Jehovah is salvation). The Jewish people may have been intentionally speaking of *physical salvation* from the Roman army abuse and occupation. *Spiritual* salvation is the more important issue. God frequently bundles our physical needs and prayer motivation with our deeper need to experience a spiritual victory and passage forward.

This also fits together according to how it played out on Palm Sunday. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey, walking on palm branches...as the people yelled *Hosannah*. The next day the Jews began to reject God’s cornerstone of the church. The people literally went from a peak worship moment on Palm Sunday to calling for the death of Jesus that same week.

Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said to him, “Let Him be crucified!” Then the governor said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they cried out all the more, saying, “Let Him be crucified!” When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children.” (Matthew 27:22-25)