

A Thanksgiving Parade

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Psalm 118 is a Psalm of action and participation. It begins with a call to give thanks to the Lord. This is immediately followed by the motivation for the call. “He is Good.” However, it is possible to interpret this word several different ways. It could mean the “Lord is good” and worthy of such thanksgiving or it could mean “it is good¹” to give thanks to the Lord.

Either way, it is a worthy reason and all those present respond with “For His loving kindness is everlasting.” Then the call goes out to Israel, the descendants of Israel the patriarch. Like wise they to respond, “For His loving kindness is everlasting.” Now to those eligible to be priest, the house of Aaron, goes the call and they respond, “For His loving kindness is everlasting.” Lastly the call goes to the God fears, which at this late post-exilic date would be proselytes to the faith.

Now how fun is that. Don’t you sometimes just wish you could jump up and be part of the sermon. Some churches incorporate responsive readings. One person read a part and the congregation responds by reading their part. Psalm 118 is a lot like that. Only this is a parade. A thanksgiving parade. How much more fun is that. They are on their way to the temple to sacrifice to the Lord. Along their way they will act out part of their history.

The lord’s lovingkindness is a word the often relates t the joint obligations of relative or friends. It speaks to their loyalty to their agreement. But here it relates to God’s relationship with Israel and particularly his graciousness toward His people. This graciousness is everlasting.

⁵ From *my* distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me *and set me* in a large place. Psalm 118:5 (NASB95)

Whether is the King now speaking or other leaders speaking in turn we cannot be sure. Here he speaks out from his condition of distress. The Hebrew word for distress carries the idea of a special narrowness, of being boxed in like he has not room to breathe. It is no surprise that the Lord answers him by setting him “in a large place” where he is no longer boxed in. We might say he is free as a bird. Some translations miss the thinking process of the Hebrew mind and translate it as though the Lord answered him in a large place, as though that was the

¹ Gerstenberger, E. (2001). Psalms Part 2, and Lamentations (Vol. 15, p. 301). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

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location. No, the answer was a large place that represents a state of trouble being trouble free.

From the state of “a large place” as the Lord’s answer to his distress, he can now say in the parallel verses of Hebrew poetry, “The Lord is for me” as though contemplating the realization of it and what it means. “What can man do to me?” “I will not fear.” “The Lord is for me among those who help me;” He then anticipates his enemy’s destruction and the satisfaction that would bring him. We can compare Psalm 54:4-5 “Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul. He will recompense the evil to my foes; Destroy them in Your faithfulness.”

The nation of Israel had been through a lot by the time of this psalm. After their defeat and exile they had returned to their homeland and found opposition from people who had previously seemed like friends (Ezra 4). Two more parallel verse give words of instruction, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in ...”. Whether “man” or “princes” the Lord wins out as the one to trust in. This portion may have been the King’s part:

¹⁰ All nations surrounded me;
In the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off.

¹¹ They surrounded me,
yes, they surrounded me;
In the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off.

¹² They surrounded me like bees;
They were extinguished as a fire of thorns;
In the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off.

¹³ You pushed me violently so that I was falling,
But the LORD helped me. Psalm 118:10–13 (NASB95)

Here we learn the cause of their distress. We see the pickle they were in, how boxed in they were. Surrounded by nations, a swarm all around. Yet it is all summed up with, “But the Lord helped me.”

Now is when the victory hymn really breaks out. Echoing a line from the Song of Moses (Exodus 15:2a)

The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation. Psalm 118:14 (NASB95)

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Verse 14 is powerful. We would not surprise me if the next two verses were sung by the whole congregation as a spontaneous response.

**¹⁵ The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.**

**¹⁶ The right hand of the LORD is exalted;
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.**

Psalm 118:15–16 (NASB95)

Even amidst such glorious jubilation, there is the remembrance of their history. The many failing as the people of God who would not serve Him as he desired. They realize how much they do not deserve this gracious treatment. They deserve to die, yet they live and the live now to testify to the great works of the Lord. Taking note that they have be disciplined, and severely so, for their unbelief and sinful past.

**¹⁷ I will not die, but live,
And tell of the works of the LORD.**

**¹⁸ The LORD has disciplined me severely,
But He has not given me over to death.**

Psalm 118:17–18 (NASB95)

With this all behind them, now the parade arrives at the gate and the king calls out to the gate keepers.

**Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I shall enter through them,
I shall give thanks to the LORD.**

Psalm 118:19 (NASB95)

His request made and is purpose stated, the gate keeper responds with

**This is the gate of the LORD;
The righteous will enter through it.**

Psalm 118:20 (NASB95)

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²¹ I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation. ²² The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. ²³ This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. ²⁵ O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity! ²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD. ²⁷ The LORD is God, and He has given us light; Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. ²⁸ You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You. ²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Psalm 118:21–29 (NASB95)

Verse 22 is a familiar one. “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.” It is quoted three times in the New Testament and alluded to three other times. It comes from Isaiah 28:16

¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.

Isaiah 28:16 (NASB95)

Here Zion is the city of Jerusalem, If the people would be safe if they believed God. But they rejected Him. Later Christ would become the source of salvation and He too would be rejected but would be the chief corner stone.

Verse 24 has become a popular song: “This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:24 (NASB95)

Then verse 29 is like a closing bracket quoting verse 1.