

Celebrate Deliverance - Psalm 118

July 4th for many of us is mostly about the beach and fireworks. Although it's our independence day, it can be hard to truly get into that mindset of celebration. Celebration goes up with the increase of two factors—how real and how valuable you perceive it to be. As you have loved ones in the military, study history, and value, the meaning and joy of independence day goes up.

As Christians we are called to celebrate a different and greater independence. We are called to celebrate our deliverance not from England but from Evil. But sometimes that's hard to do because we lack information, the battle doesn't feel real, or we simply don't value deliverance.

This morning as we close down the Hallel psalm series in Psalm 118 we can't mistake the theme. He gives 4 verses to it at the beginning of the passage...

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Let the house of Aaron say, His steadfast love endures forever.” Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

And then in a perfect frame to make sure we don't miss the point, he closes the psalm v.28 with a repeat,

**“You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.
“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!”**

If there is a single command we are to get from this passage it's this, give thanks to the Lord. That thanks, as the psalmist says, is for the Lord because of who He is and what He's done. His goodness and love toward us.

But thankfulness and celebration doesn't arise in a vacuum. It arises because of something. In between the bookends of praise the psalmist is going to help us enter into the celebration of God, which centers on God delivering us. As a structure, the psalm is set up like a procession of thanks, where you have this group of Israelites making their way up to the Temple to give thanks, singing this song. First the psalmist testifies to God's deliverance and then in v.19 they have a ceremony of thanks for deliverance.

So the goal of this morning is basically answering the how can we be thankful to God, how do we obey this command. Thankfulness arises as we know, feel and value the deliverance God's given us. Let's pray.

1. Recognize your need for deliverance

The psalmist here is using personal pronoun. He's giving his own testimony, but the language here may be reflective of a representative of Israel. Many scholars believe it to be the voice of a king. He's speaking as the king, and he's speaking most likely metaphorically from either his own life or the life of the people.

We aren't given details to the battle, but we are given details to the intensity of it. **He was in great distress, v. 5, men are against him, v.6, men hate him, v.7 and then in v.10 All nations surrounded him, v.11 They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side, v.12 They surrounded me like bees, v.13 I was pushed hard, so that I was falling. v.17 he was on the brink of death, v.18, the difficulty was severe. There's agony here, the imagery of being surrounded, like inside a cavern, rocks all around you, bees all around you.**

There's a direct tie of this trial to the difficulty and deliverance God's people experienced coming out of Egypt. We see a direct quote from the song of Moses, **v.14, the LORD is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation.”**

This may signify the scale of distress here, and possibly a national parallel to exodus of Egypt, which was when the people of God were rescued out of their exile in Babylon, on the verge of extinction, and brought back to the promise land. Some scholars even position this psalm as written in preparation for the dedication of the new temple that they would build, which we saw in Ezra.

Nevertheless, the writer, and as a representative of the people, is on the backside of deliverance from a real enemy. Death was encroaching through severe distress of some sort. For the psalmist, this was most likely certainly a physical distress, even if he's speaking on behalf of the people.

1. What do we need to know about our battle? It's spiritual.

To apply this to our modern, NT context, we must see our enemy as spiritual. We are not Israel and we are not fighting other nations. We are in a spiritual battle that is just as real, and the stakes couldn't be any higher. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, the powers, the forces in the heavenly realms." That's why we are called to bless those that persecute us. We aren't fighting them.

We must recognize that we have a real enemy and are in a real battle. As enjoyable and fun as life can be, we aren't on the playground, it's a battlefield. "Our enemy, Satan, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." We are in enemy territory. Russel Moore says the church is an outpost for the Kingdom.

2. What do we need to know about our battle? It's internal.

Though Satan is external from ourselves, the battle to be fought is not external, it's internal. Satan's influence has corrupted our species, after Adam was duped by the serpent, we have inherited a sin nature. As real as Satan is, our job is not to pick up a sword and go try to find Satan and kill him. Our job is to kill his influence that has invaded our hearts. The judgement of God is not hanging over us for how we deal with Satan externally—we aren't responsible for that. It hangs over us for how we sin—that we are accountable for. The two are surely related. Satan or demonic powers may tempt us externally, but the battle is fought within our own hearts.

3. What do we need to know about the battle? We can't win.

Where the law has increased, sin has increased. The law has been given to show us that we are transgressors. That we are in the clutches of the enemy. That he's enslaved us and overcome us, and we are guilty for it. Powerless to obey God. Powerless to live in righteousness. The heart is deceptively wicked.

4. Defeat is worse than we can imagine.

Distress does not come when you think you can control and conquer your enemy. Distress comes when you have every reason to believe you're a goner. If you think you can control sin, your losing. If you are comfortable in your sin, your losing. The enemy is fooling you. The Bible desires everyone to at some point become distressed because of sin. It's imperative you feel it, or sense it, or believe it, the moment of realizing that you are a sinner and one day you will stand before Almighty God. Defeat is worse than we could possibly imagine. That causes every heart to tremble. At some point we have to look over the precipice and see our impending eternal doom.

Essentially what we need to do, and what I'm getting at is this, we must embrace that we are sinners and powerless to do anything about it. Paul would say, I'm the chief of sinners. Paul would say, who would rescue me from this body of death. Once we get to the place of recognizing our enemy and owning our sin, we must

2. Cry out for God's deliverance

V.5 Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

The psalmist tells us that in the pit of his despair he looked to one place for help, to the Lord. Then expresses his confidence. With the Lord on his side as his helper, he can face every trial and difficulty, and will come out as the victor. Then gives us a sort of proverb.

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. He repeats for emphasis, It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.”

When we get to the end of our rope, and we are in the pit of despair, it’s not guaranteed that we are going to trust in God. Matter of fact, we often trust in a lot of other things besides God.

We trust in ourselves, that we can do better next time. We trust that we can do perform well enough for God to like us. We trust in our goodness, thinking it will outweigh the bad. We trust in religious performance—accountability programs, our bible reading, or church attendance. We trust in irreligious indulgence—fornication, materialism, and slander. We might even trust that God doesn’t hold us accountable, or that God doesn’t exist. We don’t call on God, we look for another way.

If you are trusting in something else this morning for your salvation besides God, repent. Give up trying to cleanse yourself of sin. You can’t do it. Give up trying to get enough stars on your name tag. It won’t add up. Give up running from God and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

If you are overwhelmed with guilt, call upon the Lord. He is ready to save you.

3. Receive God’s deliverance

V.10 All the nations surround me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off. v.11 in the name of the Lord I cut them off. v.12 in the name of the Lord I cut them off. v.13 but the Lord helped me. V.15 another 3 fold repetition, The right hand of the Lord does valiantly, the right hand of the Lord exalts, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.”

The psalmist gives all glory to God for how God answered His prayer and gave him the victory. God is the one who fought for him. He would summarize it in **v.14 The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. v.23, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”**

God’s word is clear, **“All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”** Notice the unconditional offer here. It doesn’t matter if you are black or white, have a full bank account or on food stamps, if you’ve been a rule keeper or a rule-breaker, had a successful life or made a wreck of your life. None of those are conditions matter to becoming a prospect for deliverance. **“All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”** The only condition is brokenness and need.

How does God deliver?

We see this in the next section. In v.19 begins a ceremony of thanks for deliverance as they arrive at the Temple gates. The speaker, as a representative of the people, faces the temple, and calls out, “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.” He wants to continue leading the people into the Temple because he wants to give thanks. And then a voice responds from within the temple, v.20, This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

Then the leader responds back, “I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

As they enter into the Temple they continue, **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”**

We are left without knowing exactly what this pointed to in the psalmists experience, but it’s likely referring to Israel as the throwaway country, to be mocked, to be seen as worthless, that it has moved to a place of prominence to regain it’s position as the nation to bless all nations. The clear point being made is that something worthless becomes priceless. The analogy used is of a cornerstone. This was the most important stone that connected the length, width, and height.

The NT shows us that the cornerstones ultimate aim was to point to Jesus. Israel would fail to be the blessing to the nations, and so a better stone was needed.

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ...11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

1 Peter 2:4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

8 and

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

The rejection of Jesus was the crucifixion of Jesus. This was God’s method of bringing deliverance. He comes to the earth as a man, then He lives the life we could never live, and dies the death we deserved. By living a perfect life and dying in our place He becomes our righteous substitute, that is, He delivers us not by removing judgment from the equation, but by taking our judgment on Himself. He delivers us by dying for us. In the cross, God’s holy justice meets God’s radical love. What looks like defeat is actually the most remarkable victory. The worthless becomes priceless.

We also see the crucifixion in 118 as the people are finishing their journey of thanksgiving. Where does it climax? It climaxes inside the Temple at the altar. The final words are v.26, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! “We bless you from the house of the Lord.” Then they say “The Lord is God, and He has made His light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar.”

A group of priests inside the temple, blesses this procession that is coming in as it heads to the altar. In the same way, crowds quote this passage in celebration as Jesus makes his way into Jerusalem on the way to another type of altar, to a cross. Not in a clean and sacred Temple, but outside the gates where refuse and criminals belong.

The procession of thanks ends at the altar. What they were giving thanks with would ultimately become what we would give thanks for. The Blessed One, who comes in the name of the Lord, is Christ, and He comes to do

war on behalf of His people, not by placing a sacrifice on the altar, but by putting Himself on the altar as the sacrifice for sins. God makes His light shine upon us in Christ's darkest hour. We also see Jesus as the gate of righteousness, by whom we are made righteous. Him alone with the righteousness to enter the Temple, and by whom we can confidently approach God. Jesus is the Temple itself, Jesus being our meeting place with God. We see Jesus as the representative King, leading His people in thankfulness to God after conquering the enemy.

4. Celebrate God's deliverance

What do you do when your greatest enemy has just been defeated, you celebrate. It's automatic. There's no hesitation when your team scores a buzzer beater to win the championship. You're propelled out of your seat into celebration. The crowd goes wild and storms the court. It's a frenzy. In some way that's what the christian church is called to do. To be a frenzy of celebration of God's goodness and everlasting love. To live our lives in this perpetual state of pandamonia craziness because God has delivered us in Christ Jesus.

We've already seen the bookends of the chapter calling for us to praise God, and right in the middle we see

v.15 "The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous." Salvation happens, what erupts is joy that finds the fullest expression in song. Words of prose don't do justice to the feelings of deliverance. They have to come up with a song.

The psalmist is pleading with us to get in on the party. **v.24, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."** This was the day of victory for the Israelites, and for us, it's the day of resurrection. Though Christ was rejected and slaughtered like a lamb, He would not stay dead. Christ coming out of the grave is the new day of living the delivered life. We are to rejoice and be glad in it. Our enemies have been put under Jesus' feet. All our sins and addictions, crushed. Satan, crushed.

May Harvest church have glad songs. In our hearts and in our mouths. And as suffering comes, may we simply sing all the more gladly, for as v.17 says, "we shall not die, but we shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord" for all eternity.