

A PRECIOUS GEM WRAPPED SMALL

Psalm 117: 1-2 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Psalm 117 is the central, middle, and shortest chapter in the Bible. There are 594 chapters before Psalm 117 and 594 chapters after it. This central chapter in the Bible contains only two verses. There is no clue in the psalm as to when it was written or by whom it was written. There is a time for everything Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 3: 1—“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” In the worship of the Lord, there is a time for brevity—for Psalm 117 has only two verses, and there is a time for longevity—Psalm 119 which has 176 verses. In one case, two verses suffice, and in the other case, 176 verses are needed. A short sermon should be full and a long sermon should not be shallow. Yet there is a place for both a short message and a long message. Although the thoughts in Psalm 117 are compressed, they are not confused. The choir singing in Psalm 117 is a universal choir of all nations and all peoples that love the Lord, who praise Him and extol Him. Psalm 117 has only seventeen words in the Hebrew and only 28 words in English. This psalm is an invitation to people the world over, Jews or Gentiles to turn to the Lord and for all believers in the Lord to join together to praise the Lord. If we properly understand this psalm, it will help us to come to appreciate the four basic privileges that belong to all of God’s people.

If Psalm 103 could be digested and condensed from twenty-two verses into two verses, it might well end up being Psalm 117. Psalm 103 gives us the universal scope of God’s salvation plan for all nations as psalmist David wrote it. Psalm 103 includes the worship of all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles. This comes out especially in Psalm 103: 17-22. Listen to the similar flavor of Psalm 103: 17-22 to Psalm 117. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David wrote, “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments. The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all. Bless the LORD, O you His angels, you mighty ones who do His word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all His hosts, His ministers, who do His will! Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!”

Beloved, the Old Testament clearly at times shows us the universal scope of God’s Gospel message of salvation. In 1834, Pastor Henry Francis Lyte, composed a grand hymn found on page 52 in our hymnal—“Praise My Soul, The King Of Heaven.” The words of Pastor Lyte’s hymn show his understanding of the

universal scope of the Gospel. He wrote five verses and verse four is left out of all the hymnals. Since I have no idea who the inspired author of Psalm 117 is, whether David, a post-exilic prophet or Asaph or another psalmist, let me tell you a little bit about the hymn writer who wrote “Praise My Soul, The King Of Heaven before I share the words of his hymn on page 52 of our hymnal. Born in 1793 and dying in 1847 at age 54, Henry Francis Lyte intended to become a doctor of medicine until God called him into the Gospel ministry. He was ordained in 1815 at age 22. He graduated from Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland where he won the prize three times for writing the best English poem. It was in the first years of ministry that God moved Henry by allowing him to minister often at the side of a dear older pastor and friend who was dying. The older minister’s faith was clouded as he faced death, getting ready to leave all his children behind. The older pastor needed peace in Christ to die, and Henry needed the peace of Christ to live. The older and younger pastors studied the scriptures together as they both found peace to live and to die. This seeking and finding of peace in Christ changed Pastor Henry Lyte for good. The older pastor’s wife was already gone Home so Henry willingly raised his children upon his death, though he was a poor single man. It was no burden for him to do it either, for his life had been changed ministering to these children’s father. Henry moved from church to church every few years until he came to settle for the rest of his ministry in a fishing village, called Lower Brixham—24 years he spent there. All his flock were fishermen. From this fishing village Henry wrote this famous hymn. Henry himself had poor health and he died at an early age. Interestingly, because of frequent times away from the pulpit and sickly, a goodly number of members in his church withdrew and went nowhere to church. Finally, before Henry resigned, the choir refused to sing. But out of this beleaguered heart for God came hymns such as “Jesus I My Cross Have Taken All To Leave And Follow Thee. He wrote “Abide With Me”—a hymn we all love. : When Henry resigned, he went to Mentone, near Nice, France, at the foot of the Maritime Alps to a climate of perpetual sunshine. There his life slowly ebbed away as he died on November 20, 1847. His last words were, “Oh, there is nothing terrible in death. Jesus steps down into the grave before me, and I have both peace and hope.” On his gravestone are written his own words from “Abide With Me.” Those words are “Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee, In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.” At age 41, as a sick pastor, Henry wrote his beloved hymn--p. 52.

Listen to the scope of his hymn which reflects Psalm 103 and Psalm 117—words written by this sickly pastor carrying the burden of raising another pastor’s children. “Praise my soul, the King of heaven, To His feet thy tribute bring; Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, Evermore His praises sing: Alleluia!

Alleluia! Praise the Everlasting King! Praise Him for His grace and favor To our fathers in distress; Praise Him, still the same as ever, Slow to chide and swift to bless. Alleluia! Alleluia! Glorious in His faithfulness! Father-like He tends and spares us, Well our feeble frame He knows; In His hands He gently bears us, Rescues us from all our foes, Alleluia! Alleluia! Widely yet His mercy flows! Frail as summer's flower we flourish; Blows the wind and it is gone; But, while mortals rise and perish, God endures unchanging on: Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise the high eternal One!" Angels in the height adore Him. Ye behold Him face to face; Sun and moon bow down before Him, Dwellers all in time and space. Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise with us the God of Grace." David, the psalmist who wrote 103 and the psalmist who wrote Psalm 117 and Pastor Henry Francis Lyte all understood the universal scope of the Gospel and its understanding that is rooted in the Old Testament.

Today, I want to attempt to help us all learn what those three poets knew—four of the mighty privileges that belong to the people of God. God help us all to share these same four mighty privileges in our day—in 2015. What are they?

WE ALL AS BELIEVERS SHARE THE PRIVILEGE OF WORSHIPPING AND PRAISING THE LORD. (I.) Notice verse 1a and 2 b. Twice we read, "Praise the Lord!" "Praise the Lord!" And once we read—"Extol Him!" which is also translated praise Him in many translations. Some might call this praising and worshipping and extolling what W. Graham Scroggie calls it in his commentary, the obligation of praise and worship. It is our obligation, but it is so much more—it is our privilege to worship and praise and extol the Lord. The first and last use of praise is the Hebrew word **halal**. It means to shine, to make clear, to make bright, to glory in, to glorify and to praise. In the last part of verse 2—the Hebrew is halleluYah. What a privilege is ours today to worship and praise the Lord!

But there is a remarkable difference in the second praise word that the ESV translates extol. The translators tried to translate the different word for praise. This Hebrew word is **shabach**. This is a rare word to describe another part of our rare privilege to praise and worship the Lord. This word translated as praise or extol occurs only four times in the Psalms and once in Ecclesiastes and once in I Chronicles. Shabach means to triumph loudly in praise, to still our hearts before God as we praise Him, loudly to adore Him, and to magnify and exalt God's name. Get the scope shabach in the four occurrences of the Psalms. In Psalm 63: 2, 3, we read David's words, "So I have looked upon You in the sanctuary, beholding Your power and glory. Because Your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will

shabach-praise You.” The second time shabach is translated praise or extol is our text in Psalm 117. The third time it is used is Psalm 145: 4—telling us, “One generation shall praise/commend—shabach Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.” The fourth time shabach is translated extol or praise is in Psalm 147: 12—saying, “Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise Your God, O Zion! But this word is translated “to still” and is used amazingly in Psalm 65: 7 to mean—“God stills the roaring of the sea.” Part of our privilege of worship and praise is that God uses it to still the raging of our terrified, frightened, wounded and screaming hearts—as we face the turbulent tides of life’s hurricanes. Another remarkable use of shabach is in Psalm 106: 47 where we read, “Save us, O Lord, our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to Your holy Name and shabach—triumph or glory in Your praise. Part of worship and praise is to lift us beyond the battles of today into the victory God has already accomplished in His death, burial and resurrection. As we praise the Lord, we become co-victors with Christ—we glory and triumph in His victory and in His praise. So first of all, we all as believers share the privilege of worshipping and praising the Lord. Secondly,

WE ALL AS BELIEVERS SHARE THE PRIVILEGE OF SHARING THE GOSPEL. (II.) Notice the word nations in v. 1a—“Praise the Lord, all nations!

The Hebrew word is **goee**. This word is literally a word that means—foreigners or Gentiles, heathen or “dogs.” What a way for a Jewish writer to start his psalm. This is an Old Testament Gospel call to the lost. This word is not only about those with a Semitic origin as the writer was. This means the diverse nationalities of all the world. Frequently in the psalms, the same word goee is translated “all the earth” or “all peoples.” The Jewish people were supposed to live a separated life from the Gentiles, but not an isolated life from them. God called Abraham to found a nation that would bring blessing to all the earth—through the child of promise—Isaac and through Abraham’s seed, speaking of Christ. God’s word to Abraham in Genesis 12: 3 is an Old Testament calling of the Gentiles—you and me to Jesus. God said to Abraham—“I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Paul quoted this call to the Gentiles in Romans 4: 17-18. Nevertheless, Israel failed in sharing the salvation of Messiah with the Gentiles, rather becoming guilty of imitating the idolatry of the Gentiles, instead of illuminating them with the light of God’s truth. In Isaiah 42: 6, God called Israel, saying, “I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the goee, for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind.” God chose the Israelites as His first sharers of the Gospel, His first evangelists. God’s call now has been given to us to share the Gospel with all nations, and Luke quotes

Isaiah 42: 6. If we are a worshipping and praising people, are we, then we should not only be obligated, but rejoice in the privilege of being a witnessing people—telling people of every tongue and tribe and nation how wonderful Jesus is. Notice in Psalm 117: 1b—Shabach Him—Extol Him, all peoples. The Hebrew word for peoples is **am**. Am is the name for mankind—every tribe—no one is left out of God’s call to Himself. We must discover like the lepers outside the gates of Samaria, in II Kings 7: 9 that we must not hoard the Gospel and keep it from those who are starving for the Word of God and desperately needing to hear the Word and being saved. With them, we must declare, “We are not doing right. This day of is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us.” With Peter and John, we must declare, “For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. We have the privilege of worshipping and praising God and witnessing of His Gospel to all peoples. 3rdly,

WE ALL AS BELIEVERS SHARE THE PRIVILEGE OF RESTING IN GOD’S GREAT STEADFAST LOVE. (III.)

Notice verse 2a – “For great is His steadfast love toward us.” With Jeremiah, we all need to remember that “it is of the Lord’s mercy, **hesed**, God’s steadfast love that we are not consumed.” We have been saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves.” Eph. 2: 8, 9. The Jewish people became proud of being God’s chosen people and they began looking down on Gentiles as “dogs.” Nothing breaks the heart of God for those of us who rest in the grace and mercy and steadfast love of the Lord, nothing breaks His heart any more than watching us look down on others that seem to be short of understanding His hesed. It breaks His heart for us to boast in the privilege of resting in God’s steadfast love as if we were even slightly above another man or woman. God forbid. Yes, we can rest—what a privilege to rest in the greatness of God’s steadfast love toward us—but all the while be witnessing to others that this grace, mercy and steadfast love is available to them as well. If we are proud as the Pharisees became, God is clear to us in I Peter 5: 5—“He resists the proud, but gives hesed, grace to the humble.” God’s hesed to us is based on His generosity to am—all mankind—to all the goe—every tongue and tribe and nation—it is never based on our performance—yours or mine. Beloved, a proud man or woman is the weakest believer God can ever have. A proud church is an impotent weak church. To seek to enjoy the praise of men is to lose the blessing of the Lord.” Can you join me in being amazed with the psalmist in Psalm 117: 2 in the greatness of God’s steadfast love to us? Hesed or mercy or steadfast love is God’s love that stoops, love that departs from the strict lines of giving us only what we deserve, and does not reward us with the retribution we all deserve. Hesed is love that is kind not only when justice is not necessary. Hesed is love that condescends to

those who are far beneath. The mercy or steadfast love of the Old Testament is the same character of God as His grace in the New Testament. But God's mercy and hesed is blended. That brings us to the last privilege—Fourthly,

WE ALL AS BELIEVERS SHARE THE PRIVILEGE OF RESTING IN GOD'S GREAT FAITHFULNESS (IV.) Notice Psalm 117: 2b—For great is...

the faithfulness of the Lord to us that endures forever.” Here comes the blend as God gives it—see John 1: 17. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Truth/faithfulness/fidelity blends with mercy. God is faithful to His covenant and to His promises. The sons of Korah tell us of this in Psalm 85: 10—“Steadfast love—**hesed**, and faithfulness—**emeth** – meaning God's truth, stability, trustworthiness and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. The Character of God blends inseparably and never clashes. God displays mercy, hesed is making promises to us, and He exhibits truth in fulfilling those promises. Both meet in His new covenant with His people sealed in His blood. They meet on the cross of Christ. They meet in the conversion of lost sinners as each of us are before we are born again. Both mercy and truth met in Christ's incarnation. Both mercy and truth will be revealed more fully than ever to us when we as Christ's Bride reach heaven. Mercy without truth would be powerless. Truth without mercy would be punishing to us forever in hell. Together, hesed and emeth, mercy or steadfast love and truth/faithfulness tell us that God can justify sinners who believe and receive Him and yet be just. God shows us—Romans 3: 26 that He is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Mercy and truth are both forever characters of God passed on to us who believe. We rest in divine assurance. God's faithfulness is unshakable. His character cannot change. His promises cannot change. So why do we fret over our feelings and our circumstances? Why do we hesitate to obey the One who abounds in faithfulness? Warren Wiesbe says of this verse, “If God calls us to do something, He is faithful to help us do it. To rely on our faith is to put faith in faith, but to rely on God's faithfulness is to put faith in the Lord.” Paul said the same in I Thess. 5: 24, “Faithful is He that calls you who also will do it.” Our resting assurance is in the Word of God and in the God of the Word. Praise the Lord!

The song is true, “You're the only God whose power none can contend. You're the only God whose name and praise will never end. You're the only God who's worthy of everything we can give. You are God, that's just the way it is. Unchangeable, Unshakable, Unstoppable, That's what you are. You are God alone.” What a psalm for us heathen-dogs, foreigners, aliens, whom God has grafted into the vine and drawn into His arms in regeneration! Praise the Lord!”