

Give Thanks to the Lord

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Bible Verse: Psalm 118
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Tonight we have the privilege of turning to Psalm 118 and I'd invite you to turn there for our study tonight, coming from Psalm 118, the final Psalm in the Egyptian Hallel, Psalms 113-118. And we're actually going to treat this text tonight and also next week because it's a very significant text in the New Testament as well.

So Psalm 118, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. 2 Oh let Israel say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." 3 Oh let the house of Aaron say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." 4 Oh let those who fear the LORD say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." 5 From my distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me and set me in a large place. 6 The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me? 7 The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me. 8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in man. 9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in princes. 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. 14 The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation. 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. 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. 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD. 20 This is the gate of the LORD; The righteous will enter through it. 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.

There's a wonderful mix in this Psalm of spiritual resolution, spiritual conviction with outspoken gratitude to the Lord for his kindness to the Psalmist and to his people. This Psalm is quoted in 12 different New Testament passages so it has a significance far beyond itself, you might say. It is a prominent passage in the New Testament and next week, as I said, we hope to look at the New Testament aspects of this Psalm and how it is used and to be able to give a week over to that and a special message to that will be very useful, I believe. For tonight, our goal is more modest, you might say. We're simply going to look at this Psalm through the eyes of an Old Testament saint. We want to understand it in the way that it would have been received at the time that it was written, and then next week we'll see how it is taken by the New Testament writers and applied to Christ and applied to the things that we understand in the church age.

What this Psalm does from the perspective of an Old Testament saint is this, is that the psalmist is praising God because God overcomes nations on his behalf. It is a stirring announcement of the sovereignty of God, an assertion of the sovereignty of God, and it appears that this Psalm was used at festival occasions to celebrate him, would have been read at Passover and other times of Jewish feasts so that it had an ongoing significance and this is something that would have been rehearsed to the Jewish mind multiple times over the course of the year, and as we've said in the past, it was likely the final Psalm that Christ sang with his disciples before he went to his crucifixion.

So there is a deep sense of affinity that we all have with this Psalm as we come to it here this evening and it's not simply how the Psalm is used, used by the Jews, how it was used in terms of the New Testament writers, but this Psalm is precious to us because of what it tells us about our God. It honors God for his loyal love. The disciple of Christ, the true saint understands something about the loyal love of God. God is not simply a lawgiver, God is the God of our salvation. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and in loyal love to his people, he sent Christ into the world in order to be the propitiation for our sins. That is a God of great and loyal love and what this Psalm does is it recognizes that the national deliverances that Israel experienced were not something that was accomplished by man, it was something that God accomplished on their behalf. It's a great celebration of the loyal love of God.

And what I want to do is kind of help you understand that this is the nature of the God that you know, the God who is your Lord if you are in Christ, and there's an aspect of this that I want to particularly bring out. There was some reading that I was doing late last night that brought this to my attention. I felt like the author didn't handle the text as well as could have been done and so I want to take you to 1 John 4 just to give us a sense of

how great the loyal love of God is from a New Testament perspective. This will kind of launch us with a focus on Christ as we consider this text from an Old Testament point of view.

So in 1 John 4:7 it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." And the author that I was reading was talking about how important it was for us to love one another, but I fear that that book missed the central point of the passage that it wanted to talk about when it was talking about 1 John because it skipped over the verses that talk about how it is that we supremely know that God loves us, how it is that we supremely know that the love of God is a settled fact for his children. And in verse 9, it says this, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

This is only tangentially, admittedly only tangentially related to Psalm 118 standing alone but it's very important for us as New Testament believers to understand this. When we talk about the love of God, the concept of the love of God in your mind should always be inextricably linked to the cross of Jesus Christ because it is at the cross of Christ where God supremely manifested his love for sinners, where he supremely manifested his love for his people. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life." And the fact that Jesus Christ was God himself, that God himself took on human flesh, that God himself went to the cross, that God himself at the cross bore the wrath of God against sinners, unworthy, undeserving, ungrateful sinners, Christ voluntarily laid down his life in order to be that substitutionary sacrifice for his people, shedding his own precious blood that his people might be saved. And when you think about that with any depth at all, you understand that that is the supreme statement of the love of God and it cannot be refuted that God is a God of love when he loved sinners just like that. And so when we go to Christ and we are conscious of our sins and, as it were, in a mental understanding we see his bleeding hands and his bleeding wounds, that that was the price of our salvation, that it was at the cross that Christ shed his precious blood, that that is where our redemption was accomplished, we see what it cost Christ in physical suffering, even more we see what it cost him in spiritual suffering as he bore eternal wrath in his body in the perfection of who he is, whatever that was like, he endured alienation from the Father that he had always had perfect fellowship with, so much so that he cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Beloved, understand that there's a sense in which that's a cry of supreme love because it was a supreme sacrifice that he was suffering like that for you and me at the cross.

And I'm quite certain that we take that far too much for granted. We're far too familiar with that truth if we can think about that and not be moved in our heart as a response to it, and to understand that it is at the cross that the love of God has been manifested. And in your times of sorrow and your times of suffering, those times where in your weakness you're questioning God, "Does God really love me? And why is this happening? And

why do I suffer so? And what's going to happen to me?" And all of your thought processes start to sink down upon you and pull you down like quicksand, it's hard to get out of that, isn't it, when you start going into that? I know by direct personal experience. I'm prone to that. I'm prone to that kind of discouragement and I have to battle it. I have to fight it. And the way that you overcome that is consistently going back to the cross again and again and again. If you have an angry frustrated spirit, if you're discouraged about things in your life and you're discontent with the providence of God in your life, in your marriage, in your family, in your church, or in your job or whatever it might be, beloved, you need to come back to the love of Christ as it's expressed at the cross. You have forgotten, if that has become the prevailing state of your mind, you have forgotten the source and the fountain of your salvation and how wonderfully saved you are and how wonderfully God has loved you in Christ. And we all need to repent of our ingratitude and our thanklessness and our grumbling complaining spirits. We all need to repent of that in light of the cross, in light of the love of Christ because if that's central to our thinking, the only thing that we can respond to, to that, is to look at that and say, "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good," right? And that's where Psalm 118 takes us in this Old Testament sense.

So we've got the cross of Christ echoing in our mind as we consider this great expression of gratitude in Psalm 118 that we're going to look at now. This Psalm, as I said, honors the loyal love of God and we see that as the primary theme in the opening and closing verses. Look at verse 1 with me as we kind of do a helicopter view of the Psalm before we land on the pad and go through it rather quickly this evening. Psalm 118:1, "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting." And then the Psalm closes on exactly that same theme with the exact same words, "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting." And as in so many Psalms, that structure, that envelope structure or you could say that bookend structure, it's starts the bookend on the left and ends at the bookend on the right. Everything on the shelf of the library in between those two bookends is telling us why we should give thanks to the Lord. It's reinforcing that sense of gratitude that he wants to express.

So this Psalm as the climax of the Egyptian Hallel is honoring God for his everlasting loyal love and we see textual clues for how these Psalms are linked together. Two weeks ago, we looked at Psalm 117, the shortest Psalm, and look at how it ends in verse 2. It says, "For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!" And then verse 1 picks up that theme of lovingkindness right away and it's repeated multiple times through the first four verses and that gives us a sense as we go through this text, there are going to be multiple instances of repetition of key terms that you find as you go through this Psalm and this is the psalmist's way of saying, "This is what I really want you to see." Look at the emphasis, look at the repetition. Hear the echo of the terms resounding throughout the text and you have a sense of the reverberation that he wants to be going on in your heart, and all of that like a good stimulating pacemaker stimulating your heart to beat and to beat not with physical blood but to beat with spiritual gratitude and thanksgiving to the Lord because he is so good to us. So look for that repetition as we go along. I'll try to point it out along the way.

There's another striking feature about this Psalm and it is the use of God's name. The use of God's name. The name for God, the proper name for God, Yahweh, which in most of your English texts is expressed in the capital letters L-O-R-D, LORD, that's the Hebrew term pronounced Yahweh, that name for God occurs 28 times in these 29 verses. That is the supreme repetition going on and that reinforces the theme of the nature of God, the lovingkindness of God because that name Yahweh tells us, it's an indication that he is Israel's covenant-keeping God. In other words, God keeps his promises. In other words, God is faithful to his people. In other words, God does what he says and he can be counted upon to do what he says and to be faithful to his people in the end.

I was speaking with another pastor one time and he made a comment that stood out to me in its insight as we talked about different trials that you go through in ministry and different things that were happening in his life. There's a stability about this man that I appreciate. One of the things that he said is that he's not focused on the process of the circumstances but on the outcome. He knows that the outcome in the Lord's hand is always going to be good because God is a loving, faithful, covenant-keeping God. And because the outcome is always good, that means there's a sense in which you can smile through the process even when it is painful, even when you are betrayed by friends and loved ones, even when the worst of human daggers are being plunged into your heart, and I know that some of you are feeling that as you sit here tonight, I know that. I know that. There's this sense that this theme that Yahweh is the faithful God of his people that let's you look beyond those circumstances and say, "Whatever the process is like, the outcome here has to be good because God is always good to His people." God is always faithful. His lovingkindness, which means his loyal love, is everlasting and he's faithful to keep his promises.

So that changes. If we would only – oh, and I'm saying this to myself, beloved. If you all went out, just turned your back and walked out the door, I'd keep saying what I'm going to say because I need to hear it myself. If we would only remember this and go back to this and meditate on it day after day, hour after hour, sometimes minute after minute, that is where we win the battle of faith in our hearts is rehearsing this again and again and again rather than collapsing under the circumstances as I am so weakly and so often prone to do. I say it to my shame. But this Psalm gives us strength to overcome that. This Psalm is part of God's word which is strong and powerful to help, which examines us to the bone and marrow which is searching to us, and God brings this word to us here tonight not to condemn us but to encourage us, to help us, to strengthen us by calling to mind his own character in our believing hearts that we would rest in him as he would want us to do and as we would find the spiritual rest that is promised to us in Christ.

So let's look, first of all, at this first section, the first four verses of this. We could call this section, it's a call to worship for timeless love. It's a call to worship for God's timeless love and we will have a total of three points here tonight and the first point is this: it's a call to worship for God's timeless love. It transcends time. It transcends circumstances. It is with us always. He is with us always even to the end of the age.

So in verse 1 we see it again,

1 Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. 2 Oh let Israel say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." 3 Oh let the house of Aaron say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." 4 Oh let those who fear the LORD say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting."

There's that repetition that I was pointing out to you from the start. Four times in the first four verses this theme is established for the rest of the Psalm. God's lovingkindness is everlasting to his people and that means that we can believe that, we can rest in it, we are to trust in it. And he sends the command out to different aspects of the nation. We see a general call to Israel. We see a call to the priestly line of Aaron. And we see an encompassing call to all of those who fear the Lord to remember this, have this central fundamental fact in the cornerstone of your worldview, the lovingkindness of God is everlasting. The lovingkindness of God is everlasting. Oh, let Truth Community Church say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." That's the embracing sense in which this Psalm opens up to us.

It's interesting to me and just to see how Scripture has come to us and how we have received it from those that transmitted it to us over the course of the centuries, look over at Psalm 115:9. You see the same groups being called upon to trust in the Lord. Psalm 115:9, "O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield." And so you see, and one of the things that I've tried to bring out as I've taught the Psalms over the years, is that we should not look at these Psalms individually but often they're placed together in context and the Psalms were compiled in a way by the compiler who was likely Ezra the scribe, and compiled in a way to reinforce themes as you're reading through the psalter. And we see that here, Psalm 115, Israel, Aaron, "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD." Well, there's an echo now in Psalm 118, Israel, Aaron, "You who fear the LORD, His lovingkindness is everlasting."

And watch this, watch this because I think it's kind of cool. You take these Psalms together, you take the message of the Psalms together and you see the call, "Trust in the LORD, you who fear the LORD because His lovingkindness is everlasting." This statement of his everlasting loyal love is not simply an assertion of his attribute. This is meant to engender a response of trust in your heart, to inform your faith. This is like water being poured on a thirsty plant that's shriveled up. Maybe it comes to you like that tonight. Your heart is shriveled up in unbelief, in doubt, and in fear, and in temptation, and in falling into sin. Well, let me just encourage you, take God at his word. This is God's word. Take him at his word. If you know Christ, take him at his word and say, "Whatever else is happening, no matter how I have stumbled, I can trust in Him because His lovingkindness is everlasting."

It's beautiful, isn't it? This is a wonderful God to know. We are greatly privileged to know this God in our Lord Jesus Christ and this has an effect even on the way that you pray. You know, I mean, you don't have to do things just exactly like this but there is a

sense in which if you've been wrestling with an issue for a long time, you've seen the kindness of the Lord shown in your life but there's something that you've been praying about repeatedly and repeatedly and nothing seems to change, there seems to be no answer, it's only getting worse, the sorrow is only going deeper, the conflict remains unresolved and you say, "I've been praying about this and praying about this and nothing has changed," words of Habakkuk the prophet. "I cry out to You, 'Violence!' and You do not save." Well, there's this sense in which, beloved, when you take God at his word, trust in the Lord for his lovingkindness is everlasting, there is a sense in which you can pray back his own character to him and say, "Lord, surely, surely You haven't deceived me as I've trusted in Your promises. Surely You haven't abandoned me here because Your lovingkindness is everlasting. And so, Lord, while You continue to delay an answer and the circumstances continue to go unchanged, Lord, surely this can't mean that You have abandoned me. Surely this cannot be a violation of Your faithfulness. That's utterly impossible and so I'm going to renew my trust in You even now based solely on Your word, not because there's anything in life to stimulate my trust right at this moment. These circumstances continue to disintegrate around me, Lord, but I rest in Your word. I trust You and surely You'll honor that trust in the end. Surely You will. You can't do anything else but that because that's who You are."

And do you see how that starts to transform the way that you think, the way that you pray? Do you see how that gives you fresh courage and impetus to move on and entrust the Lord? And haven't you in the past, we're so quick to forget under the pressure of today, we're so quick to forget the 10,000 yesterdays that we have, aren't you quick to forget the way that God has manifested his faithfulness to you in the past? Those of you that have walked with Christ for any period of time, don't you have 1,000 battles of faith that God has won on your behalf over the course if you would only stop and remember them? And he is undefeated in your past battles, isn't that true? The Lord is absolutely undefeated in your past trials. He has absolutely conquered in every one of them. Well, beloved, the trials that you're going through today are just another victory waiting to be accomplished by the hand of our great God on your behalf.

So we live in light of the outcome that we know to be certain. The outcome has to be a manifestation of the loyal love of God if you are in Christ. And God's word informs your response of faith, your past history of walking with God informs your response of faith today, the certainty of the outcome informs your response of faith today so that we go back to these streams and we drink this fresh, flowing, cool, mountain water, this pristine water that refreshes our hearts and we come back to it again and again. It's a call to worship for timeless love and so God's word tonight, my friends, God's word tonight is calling you to set aside whatever it is that you've been grumbling about, whatever you've been fearful about, set it aside and respond in worship for his timeless love. Look at the cross, look at his faithfulness to you in the past, look at his promises, and as Psalm 115 says, "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD. He is your help and shield."

Now secondly, there's this call to worship in the first four verses, you could say that the next lengthy section of the Psalm becomes an act of worship for God's timely help. An act of worship for God's timely help. So there's been this general call to worship that

says, "His lovingkindness is everlasting. Give thanks to Him." And now starting in verse 5, the psalmist responds by giving thanks to the Lord in response to that call to worship that was issued at the start, and what follows is an extended section expressed in the first person now that goes from verse 5 through verse 21. We're going to have to look at this quickly but what I want you to notice is that starting in verse 5, the language changes from the third person, well, the third person, "Let Israel say, house of Aaron say, let those who fear the LORD say," third person. Second person, "give thanks, you give thanks to the Lord for He is good." But now what we have starting in verse 5 is this extended section expressed in the first person. He starts speaking in the first person singular and you see that right from the start in verse 5.

5 From my distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me and set me in a large place.

So what he's doing here is he's giving an account. His expression of thanks is taking the form of an account of answered prayer that had occurred in the past. The Lord had delivered him from a tight place of stress and now he's in an open space of relief and that experience from this answered prayer in the past – watch this – the experience of past answered prayer gives him lessons that apply as he looks to the future. Verse 5, he looks to the past. He said, "I called on the LORD and He answered me," past tense. Now beginning in verse 6, you see him pivoting to the future.

6 The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me? 7 The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.

Having responded to the call to worship, to give thanks, he says, "I give thanks for my past answered prayer." Now he says, "That has implications for the way that I look to the future, how I live going forward. I understand something significant here. The Lord is with me therefore I'm not afraid of what man might do to me."

Look at verses 8 and 9 here. He says,

8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in man. 9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in princes.

So you see this theme of trust that we saw in Psalm 115 being echoed here in Psalm 118 again. Trust in the Lord. Don't trust in what man can do for you. Don't try to overly engineer your circumstances if you're in tight difficulties. Trust the Lord for what he is going to do. And there is this great statement, so simple in its expression and so far reaching in its implications, the Lord is for me. Verse 6, "The LORD is for me." Verse 7, "The LORD is for me."

Beloved, is your faith in Christ like that so that you can say that? Do you know Christ well enough? Do you understand salvation enough to understand that being in Christ means that the Lord God Jehovah is for you? He is on your side? He's not a neutral

umpire in your life waiting to see how things work it out and he'll either call you out or safe, you know, at home plate? No, he's on your side. He's for you. You can call upon him and know that he will receive you favorably. This is who the real God is. This is what real faith is like, so much so that it has this knowledge of God that turns into confidence that, "God is for me as I go through this life, and I am confident in that and therefore I trust in Him. I trust Him that the ultimate outcome is going to be good even if I'm staggering in my steps here tonight because the Lord is for me." So because of that, he does not need to fear what man would do to him.

Now there's an interesting aspect of Psalm 118. Those who count such things tell us that the middle two verses of the entire English Bible are Psalm 118:8-9. That's fascinating to me. 15,586 verses are before verse 8, and 15, 586 verses are after verse 9. Now this is the English Bible. The Hebrew Bible is in a completely different sequence and so we don't want to make too much of this, and what you count as the middle verses depends on what you do with verses that are contested in the realm of textual criticism. But still the numbers are interesting and give us a sense of providential focus here to the entirety of the message of Scripture.

Look there at verses 8 and 9 with me again.

8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in man. 9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in princes.

The center of the Bible gives you a center for your thinking and hope, a God-centered, Yahweh-centered, Christ-centered hope and resolution of confidence that, "I am trusting in the LORD, not in man." And what is biblical salvation from sin except a statement that says, "By faith I am trusting in Christ, in His merits, in His shed blood. I'm trusting in Him rather than in myself for my salvation before God." It's better to do that than to trust in yourself, better to trust in the work of Christ than in the works of man, in your own works. The very principle of trusting outside of ourselves in Christ for salvation is expressed in the very center of the Bible.

Now what follows, it seems as though, beginning in verse 10, it seems as though a national leader of some kind is now speaking because it seems as though he's speaking in a representative capacity for the rest of the nation, not simply on a personal level. But verses 10 through 13 he says this,

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.

You see the repetition there, right? "I will cut them off. They surrounded me." Again and again, you get this almost claustrophobic sense of hostility pressing in upon him and the

danger is right in his face breathing its hot breath right into his own nostrils, so close is the danger that he is describing here. Then he goes on in verse 13. He says,

13 You pushed me violently so that I was falling, But the LORD helped me.

So all nations were hostile to the people of God in this time that he is remembering, and in the course of the conflict, he was about to fall. The defeat was right at his feet and it was at that very moment when the conflict and the battle was most pressing upon him, when he was most surrounded, when it was like a hive of hornets were just attacking him relentlessly and swatting it away, and as you swat it away, more comes. In the midst of that, he says, "It was at that time that the LORD helped me."

Look at verse 13, "You pushed me violently so that I was falling, But the LORD helped me." The Lord had delivered him and the people and this repeated phrase, "I will cut them off," shows an emphatic sense of confidence. "Even while this is happening and when this happens again, I am going to cut them off." There will be victory in the Lord. Why? Because the lovingkindness of the Lord is everlasting. "I will have success in this." Why? Because the Lord is for me. The outcome is certain. The outcome will be good. Why? Because it could be no other way because the Lord can be trusted to do good for his people.

Now look, I'm saying this to myself as much as I am to you, but if we would only live in the realm of that thought, life would be so much simpler. Life would be so much happier and our sorrows would be softened, and the hurts would be treated with balm if we only kept our mind in this realm. It's enough to make you want to pray to the Holy Spirit, isn't it, and say, "Lord, Spirit of God, keep my mind in this realm. Help me not to so easily lose sight of where my hope is, what my trust is. Help me to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Help me to know the fullness of His trustworthiness and that that has implications for the way that my life will play out." You know, I'm a natural pessimist. As soon as something goes wrong, I think, "Oh yeah, this is really really bad." Well, do you know what? That's not a good way for me to think and talk because as soon as my mouth is talking like that, it's giving evidence that it has forgotten these very things that I'm preaching on here tonight. And I know better. I know better.

So we come back to these things again and again, and the beauty of grace, one of the aspects of the multi-splendored wonder of grace is that God's love is so loyal, so faithful, that you and I, when we know that we've been like that, we can go and say, "Lord, I've forgotten again. Have mercy on me and forgive me because I've strayed from my confidence in You once again, Lord." And the loyal love of God is so great, so perfect, so full and abundant that he washes us and cleanses us even from our own faithlessness, our own stumbles of faith, and restores us back to the fullness of sweet fellowship with him.

Now I want to tell you, that's a great God. That is lovingkindness that is everlasting. That is lovingkindness that is loyal. That is lovingkindness that can be trusted. And what should we do when we realize that we are in the hands of such loyal love and grace?

What should you do as you're walking out tonight? It's not difficult. This should be an easy question to answer. You should give thanks to the Lord for his lovingkindness is everlasting. Every one of us that are in Christ tonight should be walking out giving thanks to the Lord. You should walk out as you walk out to the parking lot tonight, the preeminent thought of your mind should be, "Thank You, Lord. You are a God of loyal love. You have shed it abroad in the heart of this unworthy sinner. You have been good to me and, God, I leave tonight thankful to You for grace." Period. Full stop. "My heart is full and wants to honor You tonight, Lord, as I walk out."

So you have this sense of give thanks to the Lord and the psalmist now is responding to that and he's worshipping God. He's worshipping God by expressing his trust and confidence to him in this way.

Now as you look there in verse 12, he said, "They surrounded me like bees; They were extinguished as a fire of thorns." The nature of dry brittle thorns is that they burn up really quickly. The thought here is that the Lord gave quick victory to him by his power. There are times, I would say that this is not the norm by which life always occurs day by day with the Lord because if it was always like what I'm about to describe, then it would lose its sense of special splendor when it happens, but there are those times where God just so powerfully moves and reorders circumstances suddenly and unexpectedly, and in the midst of a battle suddenly the Lord provides an answer that you weren't even looking for and wouldn't have even had the faith to ask for if you had thought about it. You see, it's not about our ability to contemplate what the outcome will be, our trust is in the Lord who controls the outcomes and has the ability to give quick victory if it pleases him to do so.

You remember in the Old Testament when the Assyrians were surrounding Israel and they were under a great siege and they were starving in famine? The angel of the Lord came, struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night and suddenly they went out and they had an abundance. They went from famine and on the verge of death to having an abundance to be able to provide for themselves after the long siege because the Lord himself had routed that Assyrian army by his own power. Well, the problem, I think, that some Christians fall into is that they want it to always be that way, you know, and as soon as we pray, we want the immediate answer to it. Well, you know, then where's the test of faith in this? Where's the sense of victory in a battle if it's always instantaneous. The great battles in military history are those where the outcome was in doubt, where the struggle engaged was intense, where the competing forces seemed to be on equal footing and who knows what's going to happen, and yet, you know, in the end when you win a battle like that, that's a great victory. Those are the things you celebrate with national holidays. The things that come to us instantaneously are, you know, if that was always the way it was, we wouldn't appreciate it in the same way.

So a lot of times we have to slog through and be faithful when it seems like not much is happening, but there are those times where the Lord powerfully moves and it's just like setting fire to a bunch of bramble, dried out bramble that you just light a match and it burns and it's gone and the Lord has made his victory quick and decisive. Well, when that

happens, the psalmist shows us that when a victory comes like that, the first thing that you need to do is to give glory to God. To give glory to God.

Look at verse 14. This is part of the active worship for God's timely help. So he's delivered and he comes out and he says,

14 The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.
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.

Do you see that repetition again? Right hand. Right hand. Right hand. It does valiantly. It does valiantly. Well, the right hand was the hand that held the soldier's sword in battle and it was a symbol, it was a metaphor for strength. So what he is saying is that God's strength is exalted. "The way that He has delivered me is a manifestation of how exalted His great power is. I was surrounded. I was falling. Bees, as it were, were attacking me and stinging me left and right and I couldn't get them off! And all of a sudden the Lord exercised His power on my behalf and the threat was gone. My case was resolved. There was immediate resolution and that could only be understood by recognizing it as a manifestation of the strength of God on my behalf. The God who is for me has exercised His strength on my behalf and has shown that He is worthy of my trust. I have not trusted Him in vain." So God had exercised his power to defend his people. You can't miss it with that threefold repetition.

So you look back at the trial and you say, "Well, what was the purpose of this? What's the spiritual lesson that is to be learned from this?" And what you find is in the act of worship you find this expression of faith. This expression of faith where he says in verse 17,

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.

He looks back on the trial and in a sense of Hebrews 12:4-11, he says, "Do you know what this was? Do you know what this trial and this outcome was? God had disciplined me for my own good. God was strengthening me through this trial. Perhaps God was marking out a sinful lack of faith in my life or I was bearing the consequences of my own actions and my own bad attitudes. I went through a trial but God's brought me out on the other side." He's writing and he's telling the people, he says, "God had done this for my good and my time of desperation acted as a purifying agent on my faith. It cleansed my faith. It strengthened it. It sterilized it. It made it more pure and it deepened it."

Those of you that have been Christians for more than a few months, a few years, don't you look back and understand now in retrospect that the deepest trials proved to be the times where God most grew your faith? Isn't that true? That is true without exception. God is strengthening your faith through your trials. He is purifying it. He is not acting

against you if you are in Christ. That's impossible. How could God act against the people for whom Christ died? God has been fully reconciled to us in the blood of Christ. He couldn't be against us, that's ridiculous! Out on the thought! Out on the suggestion! Forget it! That's not true! And our past experience of trials teaches us that the most spiritual growth, the most significant deposits in our account of faith were being made when God was bringing us through the deepest of trials.

So the psalmist looks back and he says, "My experience has taught me that I will live, I will one day tell of the works of the Lord because my God has not given me over to death." So that great victory of which he is speaking motivates him to express his public praise in this act of worship. He goes in verse 19 through 21, he says,

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD. 20 This is the gate of the LORD; The righteous will enter through it. 21 I shall give thanks to You,

Do you see the repetition? It's just amazing, the echoes that reverberate through this in order to give emphasis and a sense of call to what his theme is and what he does not want us to miss.

21 I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation.

The gate was the entryway into the presence of the Lord and what he's saying is, "I want to walk through that gate into the presence of the LORD and offer my thanks and gratitude and I want to do it in a public way." The one who has been truly redeemed is not content to keep his mouth closed and to hide away in a closet at home because, you know, because his faith is a private thing. That's not biblical faith. That's not real salvation. The one who has genuinely been saved, beloved, the one who has genuinely been delivered by God is so overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude for his loyal love that he says, "I've got to tell other people about it! I have to make this known! I have to give public glory! I have to ascribe glory to God publicly as the only proper response to what He has done for me." So it's part of his act of public worship to do that.

Thirdly, we see an acknowledgment of the cornerstone. An acknowledgment of the cornerstone and we'll see this much more next week when we look at the New Testament handling of this text about how Christ is the cornerstone for the church. But for now it will just be, as we said, we'll be content to look at it from the perspective of the very original first audience.

In verse 22, the psalmist is asserting how much the Lord is in control, how vast his sovereignty is, so that he says in verse 22 and 23,

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.

Now the cornerstone sets the lines and the balance for the entire building, so it's the most important stone in the structure because everything is built around it. And what he is saying here, he's using that concept as a metaphor saying the builders rejected that stone as being unfit for construction, and what the Lord did was he came and he used that stone and he built everything around it. The builders saw no value in it. It was actually precious in the sight of the Lord. It was actually the most valuable stone of them all.

So perhaps from an Old Testament perspective, what he's talking about is that the great nations of the time despised the small nation of Israel but God had chosen them and made Israel the foundation of his revelation at that time. Later, as we know, just a preview of next week, down the road when Christ was here, what did the Jews do? They rejected him. They said, "We will not have this man reign over us. His blood be on us and on our children. We have no king but Caesar." This is the Jewish leaders rejecting their own Messiah, rejecting the most valuable one of them all. And in their rejection, God takes Christ, the rejected Christ, and makes him the cornerstone of the entire church. Everything is built around him. Everything is built around Christ.

So while the oppressors had rejected the psalmist, later to reject Christ, God built from that point of rejection so that he says in verse 24,

24 This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Then he turns to prayer. He says,

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.

And so the psalmist is praying for the nation as he prepares for this worship. Animals were bound with cords and brought to the altar where they would be sacrificed, the appointed sacrifice being offered in thanksgiving to God. And so he's giving thanks and this sense of procession, of going to the altar, going to the public place of worship, it has an individual and a corporate element.

He says, "You are my God and I give thanks to You. You are my God, I extol You." So he's been talking in plural terms in the past, earlier in the text, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it," verse 24. Now he brings it down to the personal level and he says,

28 You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You.

And in that act of worship, in this acknowledgment of the cornerstone, he is exemplifying the very purpose of the Psalm.

Look at verse 29 as we close.

29 Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

You can see why a Psalm like this would conclude a group of Psalms dedicated to praising God for his compassion to the lowly. God had brought the nation out of their distress in Egypt. "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting." God had brought them into the Promised Land and driven out nations before them. "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting." God had sustained them and kept them through the cycle of judges, the sin and decline, confession and restoration. "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting." God exalted them under the hand of David and Solomon. "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting." Through the divided kingdom and all of the evil kings that were over his people with occasional exceptions, God preserved a remnant, saved 7,000 who had not knelt down before Baal. "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting." During the 400 silent years after the end of prophecy and before the coming of Christ and the Jewish people were being oppressed, there was times of deliverance where he rescued them from foreign oppressors and then the 400 years, the silence of those years were shattered by the prophetic voice of John the Baptist who announced the coming of the Christ who was immediately to follow him, and Christ comes and manifests God in human flesh. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father and I lay down My life for My sheep. I am the good shepherd." And he goes to the cross and he suffers and he dies and he's buried and God raises him from the dead, indicating that our justification is complete, that there is a perfect salvation in the one who cried out, "It is finished!" And now this Christ has ascended to the right hand, his earthly work having been done where he represents his people at the right hand of God and intercedes for them according to the will of God. And what can you say to all of that? What can you say to all of that but, "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting."

We read in the epistles about what our salvation means, that we've been delivered from sin, its power, its penalty, one day from the very presence. We've been delivered from Satan. We've delivered from death. Because Christ lives, we'll live also. We've been delivered from damnation and instead of damnation we have eternal blessedness. What can we say to that except, "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting." He saves us when we are on the verge of destruction. "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting."

I ask you, my friends, whether you know this God like that? And if you do, whether you're giving thanks to him because his lovingkindness to you is everlasting.

Let's pray together.

Father, individually and corporately we give thanks to You because Your lovingkindness is certainly everlasting. You are our loyal faithful God and we trust You for the

outcomes. O God, we trust You for the outcomes of whatever we're walking through today, that in the end You will show that You had good purposes all along, that Your hand was always at work, and that You were always moving us toward good outcomes in everything that occurred to us in life. And Father, even the greatest enemy of death becomes actually simply that which ushers us into Your eternal presence and into a face-to-face reunion with the Lord Jesus Christ. So even the worst that earth can do to us is simply going to be turned to our good by Your everlasting lovingkindness. And so, Father, we honor You tonight. We worship You. We praise You. With the psalmist in obedience to Your word, Father, from the depths of our heart we say we give thanks to You for Your lovingkindness is everlasting. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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