

## Psalm 118 • The Culmination of Right Worship

### Introduction

This is the last of what is known as the “Psalms of the Ascent”, Scripture which while the Jews could still journey to the Temple during holy days they would ritually recite in the course of coming to the Temple. Additionally, Jewish tradition today as then holds that this Psalm is to be part of the observances of both Passover (the representation of Christ’s First Coming) and the Feast of Tabernacles (the representation of Christ’s Second Coming). On one level is its use in the course of traditional Jewish observances, on another are the obvious connections to the Messiah, and for the New Testament church there is the application of what it means to worship according to Scripture’s definition. What we will find is that worship is not an activity designed to get us in the right mood for church, but in fact we are supposed to come already prepared. Our coming together is supposed to be the **culmination** of right worship, not the beginning of it.

<sup>1</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

<sup>2</sup>Oh let Israel say,

“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

<sup>3</sup>Oh let the house of Aaron say,

“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

<sup>4</sup>Oh let those who fear the LORD say,

“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

### [Read v.1-4]

**Note:** In the literal celebration and execution of this song during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Period, these verses would be sung by the entire group approaching the Temple gates.

### Q: What exactly does it mean that God is “good”?

A: When we look at how this term is used throughout the whole of Scripture we come to understand it is speaking of God as the fountain and source of all goodness. It is not just describing an aspect of God’s character but is speaking to how His lovingkindness is displayed to us.

### Q: Who is being called to “give thanks to the Lord”?

A: There are three specific groups identified: “Israel” (v.2), “the house of Aaron” (v.3), and “those who fear the LORD” (v.4).

### Q: Why do you suppose a distinction is being made between these three groups?

1. Worship is not the sole responsibility of the priesthood (“the house of Aaron”), but incumbent on everyone.
2. Worship is not the sole responsibility of Israel, God’s covenant people, but everyone who comes into a personal relationship with the One True God.
3. Worship is not restricted to those who think they have a birthright (ethnic members of Israel and descendants of Aaron) but to those born spiritually “who fear the LORD”.

**Application:** “Worship” is not an activity that is supposed to get you “in the mood” for a spiritual experience, but is an acknowledgment of the attitude your heart already has concerning God as the source of grace and goodness.

<sup>5</sup>From my distress I called upon the  
LORD;

The LORD answered me and set me in a  
large place.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD is for me; I will not fear;  
What can man do to me?

<sup>7</sup>The LORD is for me among those who  
help me;

Therefore I will look with satisfaction on  
those who hate me.

<sup>8</sup>It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
Than to trust in man.

<sup>9</sup>It is better to take refuge in the LORD

### [Read v.5-9]

**Note:** Now the leader of the procession speaks.

### Q: What is the overall topic being addressed here?

A: The repeated terms used describe God’s protection.

### Q: In v.5, how does “distress” directly contrast with “a large place”?

A: The Hebrew word is associated with a narrow, confined place. This could be translated as “out of my strait”. It is a picture of seeing no or few alternatives to having an abundance upon the intervention of God’s lovingkindness.

Than to trust in princes.

**Q: What appears to be the primary source of problems for which God's protection is especially required?**

A: According to v.6 it is others – “man”.

**Q: What might be interesting in how God's protection is shown to work in v.7?**

A: It is not exclusively supernatural, but often provided through others.

**Q: What does it mean, “I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me”?**

A: This is the Psalmist's way of expressing that there is no need for him to take personal vengeance because retribution is completely in the hands of God. It is a testimony to the completeness of God's protection not just from others but even from one's desire to take matters into one's own hands. It is the protection of the integrity of a believer's testimony that all things are under God's control.

**Q: What does it mean to “take refuge in the Lord”? How does this relate to what has been portrayed in these verses?**

A: Think of it as taking up residence within a very strong fortress which can withstand the force of any external attack. It is a picture of living **IN** the world but being protect **FROM** the world because of living within the boundaries of God's Word. Such protection could never be provided by either “man” or “princes”.

**Application:** *Worship is not visiting God's house from time to time to get away from the world, it is never leaving His presence in order to withstand the world.*

**[Read v.10-14]**

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

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

<sup>12</sup>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.

<sup>13</sup>You pushed me violently so that I was falling,

But the LORD helped me.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD is my strength and song,  
And He has become my salvation.

**Q: How has the focus changed from the previous section?**

A: Whereas the previous section was focused on individuals within the world (“man” and “princes”), here it is the world at large (“all nations”).

**Q: How might the comparison to bees be especially revealing spiritually about how God sees worldly attacks?**

A: Bees have huge numbers and can be quite irritating, but in the course of attacking an opponent the use of their stinger results in death. From a spiritual perspective it represents not just losing the earthly battle but the eternal one as well.

**Q: What does it mean, “extinguished as a fire of thorns”?**

A: Picture very dry thorny branches which when subjected to fire very quickly burn up and leave nothing but ash. It is an extension of the illustration of the bees about the futility of the world's efforts which are over in an instant on earth but have eternal repercussions.

**Q: After being “surrounded”, what is attempted next? What does it mean?**

A: “You pushed me violently so that I was falling”. (v.13) Spiritually it is the pressure to stray from God's Word and ways, the world's tug towards unfaithfulness.

**Q: How is the nature of God's protection described?**

A: “Strength”, “song”, and “salvation”. God is presently at work (“my strength”), He has been at work (“my...song”), and continues to bring the whole work to completion (“my salvation”). This is an overall contrast between what the world does to us (“they surrounded me” and “pushed me violently”) and the working of His protection on our behalf.

**Q: How does “I will surely cut them off” relate to our theme of learning about the proper application of worship?**

A: Worship requires separation from the world and its ways.

**Application:** *Worship is an exercise in rejecting the world for the sake of embracing God’s Word and ways exclusively alone.*

<sup>15</sup>The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous;

The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.

<sup>16</sup>The right hand of the LORD is exalted; The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.

<sup>17</sup>I will not die, but live, And tell of the works of the Lord.

<sup>18</sup>The LORD has disciplined me severely, But He has not given me over to death.

**[Read v.15-18]**

**Q: What is the important qualification identifying those whom the Lord protects and saves?**

A: “The righteous”. (v.15) In other words, it is those who are actively obedient and faithful to put God’s Word and ways into practice.

**Q: How is the subject changed from the previous sections?**

A: Whereas previous sections focused on what the world is trying to do to us (individuals in v.5-9 and the whole world in v.10-14), here the subject is what **God** is personally doing for us.

**Q: What is significant about “the right hand of the LORD”?**

A: The right hand represents Yahweh’s strength and power used to defeat the enemy.

*“Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power,  
Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.  
— Exodus 15:6*

**Q: What is difference between “valiantly” and “exalted” where God’s hand is concerned?**

A: “Valiantly” expresses the fact that by God’s hand a complete and total victory is realized; “exalted” expresses the gesture that the winner would make as a sign of victory which is a dual expression to both God’s people and to those rejecting Him. To God’s people it would affirm their trust in Him, to others it would be seen as a threatening gesture.

**Application:** *God’s protection is not merely a fortress which withstands the pressures of the world but actively works against those forces for victory on our behalf. We therefore do not engage in worship for strictly defensive purposes, but to express how the battle is taken up in Christ against the world. How might this suggest something about Paul’s example of the purpose of taking up the armor of Christ in Ephesians 6?*

<sup>19</sup>Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD.

<sup>20</sup>This is the gate of the LORD; The righteous will enter through it.

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

**[Read v.19-21]**

**Note:** *At this point the leader of the procession is standing in front of the Temple requesting to be admitted in. (v.19) The Levitical gatekeepers state the condition for obtaining entrance (v.20) and having been admitted the leader gives praise on their part. (v.21)*

**Q: Again, what is the important qualification in the request for admittance?**

A: They are “gates of righteousness” (v.19) and “the righteous will enter through it”. (v.20) The qualification is that entrance is granted to those already putting God’s Word and ways into practice long **BEFORE** they arrive at the entrance of the Temple.

**Application:** Explain how the following verse might apply to what is being taught in this Psalm. What is the application to our approach to worship?

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.*

— John 10:1

**Q: What are the primary benefits of being biblically qualified (“righteous”) to enter “the gate of the LORD”?**

A: “You have answered me” and “You have become my salvation”. (v.21)  
There is affirmation in this present life of all that is promised to come.

**Application:** True worship is the natural **END** of a life that walks in daily faithfulness to God’s Word and ways. God’s people are supposed to be prepared **BEFORE** they come to God’s house, not come to God’s house to somehow be equipped.

<sup>22</sup>The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief corner stone.

<sup>23</sup>This is the LORD’S doing;

It is marvelous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup>This is the day which the LORD has  
made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

<sup>25</sup>O LORD, do save, we beseech You;

O LORD, we beseech You, do send  
prosperity!

**[Read v.22-25]**

**Note:** Verses 22-25 were sung by the procession or a choir in the Temple.

**Q: How do we know that v.22-23 is speaking about the Messiah?**

A: It is specifically stated so by Jesus in Matthew 21:42 and elsewhere in the New Testament in Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20, and 1 Peter 2:4-7.

**Q: How do these opening verses hint at the concept of one Messiah, two comings?**

A: The Messiah is ultimately accepted as “the chief corner stone” but only after He was “the stone which the builders rejected”. (v.22) Before He can come as the Messiah of the Millennial Reign as symbolized by the Feast of Tabernacles, He must first come in the character of the Passover Lamb for the work of the cross.

**Q: Why is this specifically characterized as “the LORD’S doing”?**

*this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.*

— Acts 2:23–24

**Q: So when it states “This is the day”, which day is this pointing to exactly?**

A: It is actually pointing to Christ’s Second Coming, completing the work begun at His First Coming. (Note: This is a very important distinction in order to properly understand the context for the verse that follows.)

**Q: So when is the promise of earthly prosperity in Christ going to come?**

A: In the Millennial Reign.

**Q: How is the refuge of God’s protection ultimately expressed?**

A: By the Messiah “the chief cornerstone”.

**Application:** Proper worship always first and foremost begins with the priority of the work of the cross at His First Coming in the shadow of what is to come at His Second Coming.

<sup>26</sup>Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;  
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.  
<sup>27</sup>The LORD is God, and He has given us light;  
Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.  
<sup>28</sup>You are my God, and I give thanks to You;  
You are my God, I extol You.  
<sup>29</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

### [Read v.26-29]

**Note:** Verse 26 was sung by the priests/Levites, v.27 by the people, and v.28 by the leader of the procession. Everyone comes together in the final verse.

**Q: Why should it be obvious that this was NOT fulfilled at Christ's First Coming?**

A: This refrain was to be sung/spoken by the priests/Levites. At the Triumphal Entry it was the people who were saying this, not the priests or Levites. In fact, it was the religious authorities who specifically admonished Jesus to have the people **STOP** proclaiming this! They did **NOT** bless Jesus "from the house of the LORD"; they rejected Him!

**Q: Whereas in v.27 the literal celebration of the time was referring to the placement of the sacrifice on the Temple altar, how would we make an application of this for the New Testament church today?**

A: We present ourselves as "a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God". (Rom. 12:1)

**Q: How might we state the contrast of Christ being depicted first in the refrain by the priests in v.26, the people in v.27, and the leader in v.28? How is this reflected in what they corporately pronounce in the last verse?**

A: First comes the acknowledgment of the sovereignty and authority of Christ, then our submission to Him at the altar, and finally the resulting attitude of praise. This all combines to define the opening theme that God is the source of all goodness and grace, ultimately expressed through His Son.

**Application:** Right worship is the inevitable destination of daily walking the right path.

### Epilogue

Jewish tradition required the celebration of this Psalm at both Passover (the representation of Christ's First Coming) and the Feast of Tabernacles (the representation of Christ's Second Coming). A significant difference, however, is that during Passover the people were required to wave their hands as a public testimony, but during the Feast of Tabernacles they would wave palm branches.

In other words, what the people were doing at what we call the Triumphal Entry was to forgo accepting the Messiah's work as the Passover Lamb and instead jump ahead to celebrating the prosperity of the Millennial reign. What they were doing by waving palm branches instead of their hands was in effect stating they did not see the need for the work of the Messiah the Suffering Servant who had come to the cross to die for their sins, but they wanted the work of the Messiah the Conquering King who would establish His kingdom, displacing the Romans and bringing prosperity to Israel.

This is why, after the Triumphal Entry took place, Jesus stated...

"Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

— Matthew 23:38–39

*“Palm Sunday” is actually the celebration of the biggest mistake and display of false worship God’s people every made!*

*The work of the cross must always come before everything else. We cannot allow our desire for what will eventually come at Christ’s Second Coming to displace the need for what He did for us at His First Coming.*