

God's Lovingkindness Is Forever and Ever

There is a story told of some women who were washing clothes in Mexico. Because there were both cold and hot springs at this location, the ladies would come and put their clothes first in the hot springs to boil them to clean them and eliminate disease. Then they rinsed them in the cold water. There was a tourist standing there watching what was going on. He said to his tour guide, "They must think Mother Nature is kind to provide so much cold and hot water." The tour guide replied, "No, Señor, there are complaints she does not supply the soap." What did their complaints reveal about their hearts? Why did they react that way?

When the pilgrims left England on September 6, 1620, one hundred and twenty-one people wanted to go on the trip, but the boat could not take everyone. So, they reduced the number down to 102 people. The trip across the Atlantic was a very difficult one. Because it was a wooden boat, they could not have fires. So, all their meals had to be eaten cold. That was unexpected by most of the travelers. The sailors understood it very well, but the travelers apparently did not understand. As a result, many of them became ill and one of them died.

Along the way, there were fierce storms. They were so

severe that the main mast broke, and the travelers considered returning and abandoning the trip. Then they discovered that someone had brought along an iron screw. They were then able to screw it into the bottom of the broken mast, put the mast back together, and then continue onward.

Originally, they had planned to sail to Virginia. But they were unaware that because of the storm, their boat had been moved 200 miles to the north. This forced them to land in Newfoundland instead. From there, they sailed to Massachusetts and arrived sixty-five days later on November 11.

Once they landed, they learned that they were not where they were supposed to be. As they looked at the land, they realized there were no buildings. They had not arrived in

Virginia. It did not appear that anyone was living there. There was snow, and the weather was cold. They were exhausted, but they got into their boat, turned around, and tried to finish their trip to Virginia. But the currents were against them; it was the wrong time of the year. Since they could not get



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to Virginia, they decided to stay and make the best of it.

December was very difficult. It was a cold winter with ice and snow. Many of them became ill with violent coughing and scurvy. By springtime, forty-seven percent of them had

died. Of the one hundred and two people who began the journey, there were only fifty-three who lived to the spring of 1621, resulting in a huge loss of their people.

The native Americans helped them. These natives were different than those in Virginia. In Virginia, they were fighting with the settlers. But in Massachusetts, the settlers and natives became acquainted with one another. The natives helped them by teaching them how to garden and how to plant their vegetables. When October of 1621 arrived, they had a great harvest and a lot of food for the fifty-three people.

The fifty-three people included four married women. Originally, fifteen women had arrived in Massachusetts, but eleven of them died that first winter. There were five girls, nineteen teenaged boys, thirteen younger children, and twenty-two men, most of whom were single at this point because their wives had died.

But in November of 1621, they had a thanksgiving meal. They had deer, turkey, quail, and goose. They had fruit, nuts and vegetables, besides other foods. They had so much food that they invited ninety native Americans to join them who also brought food. It was a great banquet that lasted for three days.

William Bradford wrote the following, "Although it has not always been so plentiful, yet by the goodness of God, we are far from want." I thought that was a wonderful attitude! Think about all they had gone through, all the difficulties they had suffered, everything they had been denied. Many people had died.

Yet William Bradford writes that they had chosen to share their food. He wrote this was "because of the goodness of God, and we are far from want."

I could not help but think about us today had we been with them. Many of us would probably have said, "Where is my carpet, where is my heater, where is my stove and where is my campfire? Where is my Coleman lantern, my propane, and all my other things?" It would be insightful if we had to go back in time to 400 years ago, and we were the pilgrims. Would we be thankful?

I wonder why these two groups responded as they did. The first group complained because of what they did not

have. They had hot and cold running springs, but they also wanted soap.

The Pilgrims had little, and yet they were thankful even though many of them had died. What a stark contrast between the two groups. Just an amazing contrast!

Psalm 118—An Egyptian Hallel Psalm.

Today I would like you to see in Psalm 118 that there is another reason to give thanks. This is a great psalm, one of the psalms referred to as the Egyptian Hallel Psalms. The Egyptian Hallel Psalms include Psalm 113 to 118. This is the last of the series.

Psalm 118 is about a person. I believe it is about King David, who had difficult experiences in his life. This psalm is read during the Jewish Passover and at the Feast of Tabernacles. Typically, it looks toward the future millennium and messianic kingdom, or the thousand-year kingdom. It is a celebration of what is to come.

His Lovingkindness Is Everlasting. This psalm, we believe, was set to music. Parts of it were sung by a soloist, and parts were sung by a choir. The soloist could be the king or a Levitical priest. We believe that the psalm was sung as they walked in procession toward the temple. The psalmist envisions people walking into the messianic kingdom through a gate, as you will soon see.

The psalm is divided into six sections. The first section is the theme and sets the tone of the psalm.

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;

For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Oh let Israel say,

"His lovingkindness is everlasting."

Oh let the house of Aaron say,

"His lovingkindness is everlasting."

Oh let those who fear the LORD say,

"His lovingkindness is everlasting."

Psalm 118:1-4 (NASB)

Notice there is a repeating refrain. As soon as we say, "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good," there is a refrain that says, "For His lovingkindness is everlasting." It is repeated at the end of verse two, at the end of verse three, and again

at the end of verse four. We believe the soloist sang the first line, and the choir sang the last line.

If I were the soloist, I would say, "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good." Then the choir would respond with, "For His lovingkindness is everlasting." Then I would say, "Oh let Israel say," and the choir would respond, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." Then I would say, "Oh let the House of Aaron say," and the choir would then respond, "His lovingkindness is everlasting."

This is a wonderful expression of thanksgiving to Yahweh. Notice that in verse 1, when the author said, "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good," it was a call to everyone. Everyone is called to give thanks to the LORD. Then verse 2 says, "And let Israel say." This is not a call to respond. It is speaking of a smaller group, Israel. Then, with verse 3, it is even a smaller group. It says, "Let the House of Aaron say." The House of Aaron were the priests or Levites. Then verse 4 says, "Oh let those who fear the LORD say."

However, I trust that you are a believer in Jesus Christ who is trusting in Christ to have forgiven you of your sins, and that someday you will live with Him forever. If that is true, then you fear God. You are a God-fearer and verse 4 includes you.

So, the psalmist starts broadly. Then he keeps narrowing the scope until he gets to the priest. Then he includes all those who fear God. The resounding message is "His lovingkindness is everlasting," It is forever-lasting. Did you know His lovingkindness exists even when we sin? His lovingkindness is not simply momentary, not occasionally, but it exists all the time. It is like a straight line with no interruptions, breaks, or twists. It just continues forever.

When I was a math major at the university, my professors would speak about infinity. Some would illustrate infinity by drawing a dot, then connecting a short line to the dot, and then adding an arrow at the end to represent infinity. The problem with that line is that it has an arrow at the end and a dot at the beginning. The dot at the beginning means that it started at some specific point in time. But God's love is an arrow on both ends. It persists forever and never stops. It does not have a beginning, and it has no end. It simply continues forever.

The Lord Is My Refuge. The second section in this psalm starts at verse 5. It is about the soloist's relationship with God. It is truly amazing. Let us look at verses 5 through 9:

From my distress, I called upon the LORD;
The LORD answered me and set me in a large place.
The LORD is for me; I will not fear;
What can man do to me?
The LORD is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I will look with satisfaction 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.
Psalm 118:5-9 (NASB)

The psalmist is in distress. In verse 5, he says, "From my distress, I called upon the LORD." How did the Lord respond? He answered! God was listening. "In my distress, I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me and set me in a large place." The psalmist prayed because he was in distress. The message is that this soloist was in trouble. He had a problem. He prayed and God granted his request.

Now look at verse 6. "The LORD, He is for me." I love that! He is for me. He is not just for the soloist. He is also for you and for me. God is our helper. Then the psalmist said, "I will not fear. What can man do to me?" The point is that God is our ultimate protector. He will not let anything happen to us that He does not want to happen to us.

Then in verse 7 the psalmist adds, "The LORD is for me among those who help me." I love this part too! There are those who help us, and then there is the One who really helps us. The one who truly helps us is the LORD. The LORD is our real Helper. So he says, "The LORD is for me among those who help me." God is the One who even helps those who are helping you help you!

You have many people helping you. You could be in a hospital, and some people may support you and encourage you. Doctors may take care of you. But the real helper is the

ultimate Doctor. The soloist in the Psalm knew that.

So, he said, “The LORD is for me among those who help me. Therefore, I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.” Do you realize what he is saying there? He is saying that among those who do not like him, among those with whom he struggles, he will be at peace. He will not worry. He will be content.

In verse 8 he says, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to seek refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” When the psalmists refers to princes in this context, he is speaking about those in authority over us - a ruler. We do not always trust our leaders. The only person we can completely trust is God. We cannot have ultimate trust in people for I found that most people are not trustworthy. I am not surprised that many do not keep their word.

I do not trust many people. But I know this much: I can trust my God. If He says He is going to do something, I can trust my God to do it.

There are portions of this psalm that are repeated. If you look at verse 6, it says, “The LORD is for me. I will not fear.” Then in verse 7, it says “The LORD is for me among those who help me.” Those lines are sung by the choir. Then in verse 8, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD.” In verse 9, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD.” The only verses that are not repeated in this section are the first and fifth verses.

God Is My Help. The third section begins in verse 10. It is a section that acknowledges God as my help. That is the basic theme from verse 10 through verse 14. It says:

All nations surrounded me.
In the name of the LORD,
I will surely cut them off.
They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me;
In the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off.
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 pushed me violently so that I was falling,
But the LORD helped me.

The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.
Psalm 118:10-14 (NASB)

Verse 10 leaves us with a very distinct impression that this psalmist have had some serious problems. We are told that the reason he prayed was, “The nations surrounded me.” In verse 11, he says, “They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me. And they surrounded me like bees.” So many of them! Have you ever been among bees that were swarming around you? When bees are around you, they do not merely stand around you in a circle. They are flying all around you and maybe toward you. They are coming from every direction. That is the idea. This soloist was in very serious trouble. King David had trouble. There was opposition all around him. He was in a very difficult place.

And verse 13 is amazing. He said, “You pushed me violently so that I was falling.” Here, the context of “you” is plural. It is referring to the nations and the people who were surrounding him like bees. What a vivid image! But notice his response, “In the name of the LORD, I will surely cut them off.”

It sounds like David himself is going to fight them. That is not a very good translation of the Hebrew text. A better translation would be, “In the name of the LORD, I have pushed them away.” That is a better translation. All these nations had surrounded him. So he said, “In the name of the LORD” he had been able to push them away. Notice that David (if in fact it is David who is speaking), does not say who pushed them away. Who do you think did it?

You can lock your house. You can guard your place. You can even bury your money in the backyard. You can do all kinds of things to protect yourself. But if the LORD is not helping you, there will be no protection. It was the LORD who pushed his enemies away.

Verse 1 continues with, “They surrounded me like bees; They were extinguished like fire of thorns.” God eliminated them. He took care of his enemies. “You pushed me violently so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.” Again, God helped to push them away.

Verse 14 adds, “The LORD is my strength and song.

He has become my salvation.” The psalmist is moving to a climax. He does not just praise the Lord for being His strength. He says God my song and my salvation. No one else truly qualifies. Only the LORD is his salvation. This phrase “He has become my salvation” occurs only two times in this psalm.

Our God Is Great. Verse 15 introduces the fourth section. It is about God’s greatness. Here is verse 15,

*The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.
Psalm 118:15 (NASB)*

A better translation of the verse would be that the hand of the LORD is glorious. He does great things. He does glorious things. He does mighty things.

*The right hand of the LORD is exalted.
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.
Psalm 118:16 (NASB)*

That is, He does great and glorious and mighty things.

*I will not die, but will live,
And tell of the works of the LORD.
The LORD has disciplined me severely,
But He has not given me over to death.
Psalm 118:15-18 (NASB)*

Here the soloist finally reveals that all the problems that he had been having was because God was disciplining him. What a stunning thought! As I was studying this psalm, I suddenly understood this man had sinned. This means that the distress he expressed in verse 5 occurred because of his own sin. He was in distress because of something he himself had done wrong. God was punishing him. The nations that surrounded him were surrounding him like bees because of his own sin. God was disciplining him.

Yet, during his discipline, He looked to God. He looked to the One who was punishing him for his own sin. I found

this absolutely amazing. Most of us start complaining and griping to God. Maybe the psalmist did at first but it is not recorded if he did. Here is a man who was being disciplined, and what he is saying is quite amazing.

In the first part of verse 15 the soloist sings, “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.” Then the choir sings in the last part, “The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.” But notice what verse 15 says: “The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous.” Who shouts? Who is joyful? The righteous are. The righteous are those who are joyful. They are those who fear God.

If you do not belong to God, there is not much reason to rejoice. If you do not belong to God, there is truly no reason to rejoice because God will not be your helper, God is not your strength. God will not do mighty and wondrous things for you.

The Righteous Shall Enter. Verse 19 now introduces us to the fifth section which is all about the righteous. This section, verses 19-21, is a solo. The author says,

*Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD;
The righteous will enter through it.
I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me,
And You have become my salvation.
Psalm 118:19-21 (NASB)*

It is all about the righteous. Notice that he refers to the gates. It is the gates of the New Jerusalem. He asks for the gates to be opened. He is moving through the gates of the righteous. In the millennial kingdom there will be no gates for the wicked. There will only be gates for the righteous.

He says, “Open to me the gates of the righteous.” The soloist knows he is righteous. It means that the soloist knows he belongs to the LORD. He says that he can walk through the gates. The choir is going to walk through the gates with him. So, he is not alone. He is not by himself.

When verse 20 says, “This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will enter through it,” and verse 21 adds, “I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me,” we discover that he knows God has answered his prayers. So, he is very thankful.

The Chief Cornerstone. Verses 22-27 are the sixth section of the psalm. In this section the choir sings.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Psalm 118:22 (NASB)

Believers will recognize that this statement is spoken of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:4-8). The literal meaning of this verse is that a stone that was rejected becomes the most important stone of the building. Maybe the psalmist was thinking about an actual stone that was rejected and became the chief cornerstone for the temple? But the application directly applies to the psalmist who could be Moses or David. He had been rejected by surrounding nations but God raised him up as if he were the chief cornerstone. This verse looks forward to Christ.

Notice that the tone of this section is no longer “I” or “me.” It is now “we” and “our.” We read:

**The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the LORD’s doing;
Psalm 118:22-23a (NASB)**

(Not ours, not mine, nobody else’s, just the LORD’s),

**It is marvelous to our eyes.
Psalm 118:23b (NASB)**

(In other words, the choir’s eyes).

**This is the day that the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
O LORD, do save, we beseech You,
O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the**

**LORD;
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.
The LORD is God, and He has given us light;
Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.
Psalm 118:24-27 (NASB)**

What is the choir doing? The choir is honoring and worshipping the LORD for what he has done.

The Lord’s Lovingkindness Is Everlasting.

Now in the last section, verses 28-29, the soloist returns. I think this is a great section.

**You are my God, and I give thanks to You;
You are my God, I extol you.
Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Psalm 118:28-29 (NASB)**

In verse 14, he says, “The LORD is my strength.” Then he calls Him, “my salvation.” Then in verse 28 he says, “You are my God.” When you think about God, do you think about God as being merely “a god?” Did you know that God is much more than just “a god?” That might sound strange. My point is that God is not an uncaring, detached, or an indifferent god. He shepherds! He cares! He gives us strength! There is a sense in which you yourself own these blessings. Once you belong to God, not only does He own you, but you are part of His family. He is your God. He is your shepherd. He gives you strength that in a sense is your own strength that you are going to have.

All through this psalm, the psalmist speaks of “His lovingkindness that never fails.” He is my help. He is my salvation. He is good. He listens to our prayers. He is our strength. He does miracles for us. He is loving and kind.

It is a wonderful and great psalm about God. But even more interesting is the psalmist who was going through a time of suffering in his life, and he learns that God loves him and cares for him, even when he is being punished for sins.

Sometimes, especially when times are tough, it is difficult for us to be thankful. It is easy to thank God when things

are good. When you come to Thanksgiving day this week you might feel very thankful because of the little or the major difficulties you have been experiencing. If so, just remember to give thanks to God from your heart for what He has done for you.

The last two verses of this psalm are different. I do not know if you read it, but there is another reason to thank God than simply for the many things that He has done. Notice what the psalmist says: “You are my God and I give thanks to You; You are my God and I extol You. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For his lovingkindness is everlasting.”

We should thank God for Who He is. He is a good God. He is a holy God. He is a kind God. His lovingkindness lasts forever. We can thank Him because of Who He is.

I want to close with a poem. Then I am going to repeat part of the psalm. The poem reads as follows,

The roar of the world is in my ears.
Thank God for the roar of the world!
Thank God for the mighty tide of fears against me
always hurled!
Thank God for the bitter and ceaseless strife,
And the sting of His chastening rod!
Thank God for the stress and pain of life,
And Oh, thank God for God!

Now, let us read the last two verses of Psalm 118, again.

You are my God, and I give thanks to You;
You are my God, I extol you.
Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Psalm 118:28-29 (NASB)