

Walk in his way: The way of his love

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Paul Simon sang, Negotiations and love songs are often mistaken for one and the same.

A somewhat wounded reflection on the experience of love and singing a love song. Although the majority of biblical psalms are lament songs, when they are love songs, they really aren't mistakable for anything else.

Psalms 118 is such a psalm. Psalm 118, is in book 5 of the Psalter. Book 5 is the climax, the thanksgiving answer to the trauma of book 4.

Psalms 118 is at the center of a great run of psalms on thanksgiving. Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures, it stands, is forever.

[1 : 28] The first line in Psalm 107, the first and last line in Psalm 118, and then in 136, not only the exact first line, but the phrase, his love endures forever, repeated in every line of that psalm.

There's a small group of psalms within that, 107 to 136, which is 113 to 118.

And these psalms are known as the Hallel psalm. Hallel being the Hebrew word for praise. Psalm 118 is known as the great Hallel.

They were regularly used and still are used in the Jewish community at Passover time. You'll no doubt have noticed that Psalm 118 does not have any heading.

There's no indication given in the text of the psalm about the purpose of the psalm or any situation in which it was written. All we have is the context in which we find the psalm, the partners next to which we find the psalm.

[2 : 45] God's people are giving thanks because the goodness of God is displayed for them in his steadfast love.

For Old Testament Israel, God's love was displayed in the Exodus from Egypt. an undeserved work of love in which God brought his people from the house of slavery into a promised land.

That Exodus work was renewed for the people of Israel in the return from exile experience. After the failure of the kings and the Babylonian captivity, God set his people free and brought them home.

The twin themes then of Exodus and promised land, of leaving a place of slavery and journeying to a place of God's presence are woven into this psalm which we have today.

There are many places in Scripture where we read of God's goodness. God's goodness is displayed for us in creation, in working wonders for his people, in sustaining all life.

[4 : 06] God's goodness is displayed in his redeeming love. God loves us.

God has not acted in Jesus Christ to save you and me for any other reason than he loves us.

This great thanksgiving psalm is an invitation to us that we should walk in the way of his love. The Exodus from Egypt is the great Old Testament work of redemption.

You will know that the people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt and were abused by the Egyptians.

They were powerless to redeem themselves and they cried out to the Lord for their salvation.

At no time is there any suggestion at all anywhere in Scripture that the people were enslaved in Egypt as a consequence of sin.

[5 : 16] Their release from Egypt and the Exodus was not about being forgiven for sin and then set free from sin. The suffering of the people in Egypt was entirely the result of the wickedness of their enemies.

In Psalm 118, very unusually, there is no mention by the psalmist of their own sin.

There are no appeals for forgiveness of sin or freedom from sin. There is distress caused by enemies and circumstances, but there's nothing about sin.

The journey from slavery to the presence of God, yes, we know the rest of Scripture includes the journey from sin into forgiveness, but there is more than that.

There are other freedoms, other enemies from which we are released and free into which we walk. And that's part of what we see in this psalm this morning.

[6 : 36] John read for us the psalmist recounting that he is in distress, that he is in fear, that he is hated. You maybe noticed the word bee was used.

The enemy swarm around the psalmist like bees. If you really like bees, I'm sorry, but the word bee is not common in the Old Testament.

It only appears four times. This is one of them, so three other times. One of those other times in which the word bee appears is in part of the Exodus story recorded in Deuteronomy chapter one. The Amorites who live in the hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do. Once you start getting connections between one part of scripture and another part, they buzz around all over the place.

No? Buzz? Bees? Okay. Just a small connection with the Exodus story woven into the text of the psalm.

[7 : 43] The experience of the people of Israel in Egypt and the Exodus journey is the same experience and journey which the psalmist is engaged on.

The same experience because the love of God for his people which redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the place of his presence is the same love which God had for the psalmist and restored him and rescued him from his distress and delivered him into God's presence is the same love that God has for us to rescue us from our distress to remove us from the air and bring us into his presence.

The Lord who loves us is the Lord who answers our cry the Lord who is on our side the Lord who is our helper the Lord who is our refuge the name of the Lord is powerful to overcome any and every surrounding opponent.

The goal of the Exodus the purpose of the way of love upon which we are to walk is declared clearly for us in verse 17 of the psalm I shall not die but I shall live.

The love of the Lord transfers us from death into life. The aim of the Lord's redeeming love is that we live that we are not dead.

[9 : 23] We are saved for life from death. I have been told I haven't explored every taxi company in London but I have been told that in London there is a taxi company called Karma Cabs.

It is the journey that matters. Now that is fine if you run a taxi. I am sure the journey does matter as long as the meter is running. But the Exodus story the way of his love is about arriving in his presence arriving in his love leaving behind distress and oppression and ending up in freedom and peace and life.

we only make this journey because the Lord loves us. His redeeming love is forever. Our song is love unknown our saviour's love for us cross shaped love.

We will not trust in human love or in human resourcefulness for our transfer from darkness into light from the absence of God in his presence.

We will only trust in the cross of Christ. We will not trust in weak human princes or leaders or prime ministers or presidents or any other human for our life.

[10 : 57] Only we will only trust in the cross of Christ. Every time we sing of his cross we sing of his love. Every time we remember our salvation we remember his love.

Every time we trust Christ alone for our new life we are walking in the way of his love. You can walk in his love.

You can know this exodus leading you from death into life because he loves you and he welcomes you to walk in his way.

life the promised land is the destination of the great old testament work of redemption. As disciples of Jesus we are not wandering aimlessly.

Some others who wander may be lost but we are not. By the time we get to the new testament the promised land is not an area geographically measured in feet or in chase.

[12 : 03] other more modern measurements of area are available but feet and inches will do fine. The promised land, the goal of the exodus is the presence of God.

The final chapters of the great book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament all the way from chapter 40 to 48 are a vision of the renewed post-exilic promised land.

a vision of a restored city where God's people from every tribe and nation are gathered and the name of the city is the Lord is there.

The final words, in Hebrew just two words, the final words of this long 48 chapters book, the Lord is there.

That's the name of the city. The vision of the promised land is not about geography but about God and his presence and being with him where he is.

[13:11] Just the other week when we were reading in 1 Peter we read that Jesus is the temple. The temple is not about bricks and stones and mortar but is Jesus.

Jesus is the stone the builders rejected which has become the cornerstone. Did you notice that well-known verse as John read in the psalm?

The destination to which we long to arrive is the presence of the Lord. The psalmist teaches us to pray, open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord that the righteous may enter through it. It isn't enough to be set free from death and slavery.

It's not nearly enough. We long to enter in to the presence of the Lord, to come in through the gate of his righteousness, that gate which the Lord Jesus himself is for us, that gate shaped by righteousness, the righteousness of God himself imparted to us through Christ, the faithfulness of Christ to that righteousness of God upon which our life depends.

[14:39] That's where we're going and where we're going is also how we get there. We're going into the presence of the God who loves us and his love is how we get there.

This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Of course it can only be his doing.

We did not even know we were lost. We could not find the way. We didn't know where we were aiming for. His love alone has shown us that there is a way.

His love alone makes possible for us the arrival in his presence. How can we fail to rejoice and be glad in this day of the Lord, this day of the resurrection, this day of our new life?

Save us, we pray, oh Lord. Lord, we pray, give us success. We have walked on the way of his love and we continue to walk on the way of his love.

[15:52] We have entered the gates of righteousness and known the presence of the Lord. We continue to enter those and continue to desire and long for more of his presence.

And so we pray, Hosanna, save us. Where else did you think the disciples got those words when Jesus rode into Jerusalem?

We pray for ourselves. We pray for one another. We pray and we are not going to give up praying. Unless this prayer is answered, we are lost and hopeless.

His love alone is the answer to our prayer. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Another Palm Sunday phrase.

We bless you from the house of the Lord. Do you notice a slight change there in that line? The Palm Sunday cry of blessing on the one who comes in the name of the Lord and the character of the Lord.

[16:58] And then we bless you from the house of the Lord. Those who have entered, those who have been made righteous by the blood of the Lamb, those who have walked in the way of his love, who have entered his love and his presence and know his love, we bless you, every other, every other person in all creation.

The Lord has made the light of his love shine upon us and we long for the light of his love to shine upon others. The goodness of his love is made known in his salvation of us, in our entry into the renewed promised land, but the goodness of his love is multiplied as we live to bless others with his love, in his love, for his love, longing that they might walk on the way of his love and come also into his presence.

Through our renewed lives, as we walk on the way of his love, the Lord of love blesses those around us.

Through your sharing his love with others, when you are patient with them, when you are generous and kind, not difficult things to do, but expressions of his love, God makes his love known to others. Today, this psalm is a call for us to walk in his way, the way of his love. But as we walk in the way of his love, we do that by blessing others.

[18 : 51] Because he loves us, we love those whom he also loves. love, you can walk in the way of his love.

You can come into his presence, the new promised land. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever.

The majority of our psalms, as we said last week, are psalms of lamentation, psalms where we are troubled by sin and by enemies. Sometimes we wonder, especially if we've just been watching the news, how can we sing love songs to the Lord of his love for us?

How can we give thanks when in our own lives, never mind the news, we are surrounded by troubles? Surely psalms like this one then are only for rare days or for exceptional saints.

Or for those too blind to notice the world around them. By no means. There's an Old Testament book, you might have noticed, called Lamentations.

[20 : 07] I'm sure you've noticed and thought, well, I'm not going to read that. Life's tough enough without reading a whole book called Lamentations. Five poems lamenting the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, but right in the middle of the middle poem, we read these words.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

The Lord's love is new for you every single morning. Whenever you wake from sleep, you can be certain of this.

The Lord still loves you, and His way of love is there for you to walk upon it. With the same faithfulness with which the Lord brings morning after evening, sun after rain, harvest after seed time, with that same faithfulness, His love is new for you every single morning.

With the same faithfulness grace upon which the Lord Jesus depended, that same faithfulness which kept hold of the Lord Jesus on the cross, in the grave, through the tomb, with that very same faithfulness, His love is new for you every single morning.

[21 : 39] Knowing the love of the Lord, we give thanks to our God. Knowing the love of the Lord, we recognize His goodness for us and for all creation.

Knowing the love of the Lord, which is steadfast and sure, which stands today and will stand forever, we walk in the way of His love until Christ comes or calls us home.

Let's pray together. Father, we give you thanks that you sing love songs over us, that you give us love songs that we might sing of you and your amazing love for us.

We pray that by your Spirit you would strengthen our steps, that we would walk step after step in the way of your love. We pray this for ourselves and for one another.

And we pray for all those we know who know nothing of you and your way, that as we live in your love, our lives would bless them and that they would come to know Jesus and walk in the way of His love.

[22 : 59] May it work among us, we pray, our God and our King. Amen. Amen.