

A Salvation to Rejoice In

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[0 : 00] O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let Israel say, his steadfast love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron say, his steadfast love endures forever.

Let those who fear the Lord say, his steadfast love endures forever. Out of my distress, I called on the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free.

The Lord is on my side. I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper. I shall look in triumph 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. All nations surrounded me in the name of the Lord. I cut them off.

[1 : 12] They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. They surrounded me like bees. They went out like a fire among thorns.

In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. I was pushed hard so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.

Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord exalts.

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

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. The righteous shall enter through it.

[2 : 17] I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O Lord. O Lord, we pray, give us success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.

Bind the festal sacrifice with cords up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you.

You are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

[3 : 19] Father God, we thank you that you haven't left us in the dark about your existence and your plan of salvation. We thank you that you speak to us through your word.

Please help us to listen to you now. Amen. Well, do keep your Bible open at Psalm 118.

It's great to have a physical Bible with you to help just to see the verses. And have a look down at verse 29. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

This is an upbeat psalm. Lots of joy and gladness and rejoicing. It's full of thankfulness. And the aim of the psalm is quite simple.

The psalmist wants us to be thankful too. That's how the psalm both starts and ends. It's a public call for God's people to be marked by thankfulness to God.

[4 : 30] Just as we start there, we know it's good to be thankful. Now, we tell our children all the time to be thankful. We make them write thank you letters and to be grateful for what they have.

At the moment, we are trying to convince our two-year-old to be thankful for the toys he has, rather than pieing after the ones he hasn't. But then how about us?

I mean, thanks often rolls off the tongue when it comes to people. Someone makes you a cup of coffee. Thanks very much. That's great. Someone opens the door for you. Oh, thanks.

That's great. But what about when it comes to God? If you're like me, the response is often far slower to give thanks.

I guess over the past year, it's been easy not to be thankful, to become bitter, and perhaps direct some of that towards God.

[5 : 32] So how can this genuine, consistent thankfulness to God be possible? Well, by being reminded afresh that God saves.

Psalm 81 is read a bit like a script, kind of like a play. It was used by Israelite pilgrims on their way to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. And it's still used today in the Passover meal.

We're told in Matthew's Gospel that after the Last Supper, Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples.

And so it's likely the last hymn Jesus sang was Psalm 118.

And as we go through, we can see he definitely had it ringing in his ears throughout the week leading up to his death and resurrection. At its heart is a ceremony, a retelling of God's saving work in the life of a king.

And then how that salvation is worked out in the lives of the people bringing thankfulness. So we'll tackle it in two halves. Firstly, the salvation of God's king and then the salvation of God's people.

[6 : 48] So firstly, then the salvation of God's king. Now, last week, we looked at the first part of Psalm 118 in verses 1 to 14. We saw the king was in a battle.

He was surrounded on every side by enemies who are like bees. But there was a great turnaround. We're not told about the military strategy or the bravery of the troops.

The point is God turned the situation around. Have a look down at verse 13. Verse 13. But the Lord helped me.

The king didn't come back from battle bragging about his victory and his strategy. But praise God because of his salvation. And so let's pick up the psalm from verse 14.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

[7 : 49] The right hand of the Lord exalts. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. These words are taken from the song of Moses in Exodus 15, celebrating the rescue from Egypt.

And that theme of God's rescue from Egypt is woven all the way through this psalm. And the king in the psalm sees the Exodus likeness stamped over his victory.

There's no other way of explaining it that the Lord was powerfully at work out of love for his people. And so he continues in verse 17.

I shall not die. But I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has disciplined me severely. He has not given me over to death.

The kings of Israel frequently got themselves into trouble by ignoring God and leading the people into sin. And it seems the king here views his trouble, or at least some of his trouble, as down to his own discipline.

[8 : 55] The result of his own sin. He is looking death square between the eyes. But he was saved and he was given the victory by God.

And then the following verses picture a euphoric victory parade and ceremony. When England won the Rugby World Cup in 2003, I was a teenager.

And me and a few friends decided to travel down from our Suffolk backwater to London to see the bright lights and for the open bus victory parade.

We were there in Trafalgar Square as thousands of people gathered cheering. People hanging off the lampposts to see a glimpse of the victors with the cup on their way to Buckingham Palace, the seat of power.

Well, here we have a similar picture. The victorious king who's coming back from battle with a crowd arriving at the temple, the seat of God's power.

[10 : 00] Saying, verse 19. The king says, open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

Then the priests answer back from inside the temple, verse 20. This is the gate of the Lord. The righteous shall enter through it. Or in other words, do come in.

And once inside, the king then says, verse 21. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

God has answered this king's cry for help. He has been saved. He's been brought back from the brink of death. And then comes a declaration, probably from the priest in the temple, verse 22.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. It's not just saying that this king was saved and now he's just a bit more useful.

[11:03] But that through this victory, he became the foundational figure to lead God's people. The foundational figure in God's plan in the world.

In the same way that the cornerstone in ancient building times was the foundational stone. And all other stones in the building were built around it. And they depended on that stone for the building to stay up.

And so then, we have a king being disciplined, rescued from death. We have a victory parade of a righteous person entering God's presence in the temple.

We have the declaration that he is the foundational figure leading God's people. Today is Palm Sunday. I wonder if you can spot the events of Easter in a nutshell there.

Now, we don't know the personal circumstances of this king that might have led him to say the words of verse 22. But Jesus clearly applied them to himself.

[12:11] After he entered Jerusalem, he spent some time debating with the religious leaders. And he told the parable of the tenants, pronouncing judgment on them for rejecting him.

And the vineyard, God's paradise, being handed over to other people. And so, Jesus is there. And let's pick it up. Let's turn to Luke chapter 20, verse 17. If you have a Bible. Jesus looked directly at them.

What then is this that is written? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.

And when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. The leaders, the religious leaders were to be building God's people. And yet, Jesus Christ himself, God, comes to them and is rejected.

[13:16] But then he becomes the chief cornerstone. How? Well, ultimately through his death, resurrection, and ascension.

You see, God saved this king in Psalm 118 from death. That's how it played out in history then. But Jesus, the Messiah King, was saved through death.

He couldn't exactly sing verse 17, I shall not die. But he can say, he has not given me over to death. Now, when Jesus sang these words at the Last Supper, he knew he was facing death the next day. He knew he would be disciplined by God. But not for his own sin, but for my sin and for your sin. And he knew the story wouldn't end in his death.

The attack would be short-lived. Because on the third day, God raised him to life again and he is alive again today. Death, in one sense, did not conquer Jesus.

[14:24] He was not given over to death. Instead, in Jesus, death itself has been conquered. And so just as the king then in Psalm 118 is welcomed into the temple, into God's presence, well then Jesus, as he resurrected from the grave, ascended to heaven, is welcomed into God's presence at the right hand of the Father.

The righteous one sat down at the hand of the Father. And so Jesus, in quoting verse 22, wants us to see that he is the one Psalm 118 is pointing to.

God's true king. The cornerstone of history. The cornerstone of God's salvation plan. And his involvement in the world today. Now, to our world that has rejected Jesus, Easter is a chance to enjoy bank holidays, eat chocolate and sit in traffic.

But whilst we can enjoy rest and chocolate, we can be assured again that Easter is the foundation of which our faith is built. The foundation of which history is built and God's plan in the world today. And being more convinced of that will help us and to stand firm in a world that rejects Jesus.

Indeed, the apostle Peter based his defense of the resurrection on that verse 22.

[15:56] He was before the religious leaders in Acts 4. And he says, you are the builders who rejected Jesus. He has become the chief cornerstone. And so he says in verse 12, Acts 4.

There is salvation in no one else. But there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. It was always God's plan for his king to die and to rise again.

To become the cornerstone of salvation and of God's people. So the salvation of God's king. The psalm then moves from the singular to the plural.

Other voices join in. The camera pans from the king and moves across to the crowd. And we have to ask the question, why is the salvation of a particular king in history the very center of a very public festival?

Well, because the salvation of God's king means the salvation of God's people. So that's our second thing to note, the salvation of God's people.

[17 : 06] Or more fully, the salvation of God's people in God's king. Now in our national anthem, we sing God save the queen, send her victorious.

Now we wish the queen well for her own sake, of course. That's not why it's there in the anthem. We wish her well for the nation's sake. For political stability.

Perhaps in the days of the more absolute monarchy, defeat in battle would have disastrous consequences for the nation. And so when this king is victorious, the people are victorious. When the king is saved, the people are saved. The king has come back from personal suffering, not just as some survivor who battled through against the odds, but a victorious overcomer who has secured the future of the nation.

And so the people respond to that in their salvation ceremony, in the temple, with a deep thanks and praise to God. Have a look down at verse 23.

[18 : 19] This is the Lord's doing. It is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Now it's true that the Lord has made every day, and there is reason to rejoice and be glad in every day. And yet specifically, the day the Lord made to rejoice and be glad in, in this psalm, is the day of salvation.

The day that secured the future of the nation. At the end of the Second World War, when VE Day was declared, it didn't take long for the parties to start.

I read this week that almost every road in Dulwich had a bonfire in their streets. Apparently a bonfire in Goodwich Road in East Dulwich set fire to a neighbouring tree.

It got out of hand. And so the fire brigade came, they put the tree out, and they stayed and partied with the people. Pianos were dragged out of the houses to the roads.

[19 : 28] Radios were turned up for full volume, and music blared out all night long. It was a great day of celebration. And in effect, the whole nation was taking hold of a victory that was theirs, and they were rejoicing.

Well, that's what's going on in here in a similar way. God's people taking hold of a victory that is theirs. And yet they know exactly who the victory was down to.

This is the Lord's doing. This is the day the Lord has made. It's all down to God alone. And the rejoicing goes on as the priest in the ceremony cries out, verse 26, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And then the priest says to the crowd, we bless you, that's you plural, from the house of the Lord.

Finally, verse 26, in the ceremony, the king comes, he approaches the altar, where he offers a sacrifice of thanks to God, the supremely kingly duty.

Bind the festal sacrifice with cords up to the horns of the altar. A new beginning has emerged. And so the crowd cry out in verse 27, the Lord is God.

[20 : 55] He has made his light to shine upon us. This is a massive celebration, a spontaneous carnival atmosphere. It's there, the E-Day. They're heading up to the altar with thanks and praise to this wonderful God who has saved them, giving them victory in the victory of their king.

Well, again, this psalm is here to point forward to a greater victory by a greater king, a victory that we can take hold of for ourselves.

A greater king who is given a king's welcome as he comes to the temple for the Passover celebrations. If you have a Bible, please turn to Luke chapter 19.

I've put some verses on the handout. If you have that printed off. Jesus is there. He's riding on the donkey into Jerusalem.

So verse 37, as Jesus was drawing near, already on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

[22 : 16] Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the air crackled with excitement and expectation. They waved the palm branches.

The Messiah King has come. Victory is ours. Deliverance finally from the Romans. Freedom, a new beginning. And so they say the words of verse 26 in our psalm.

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. But Jesus knew that the deliverance that they needed, the people needed, and all people needed, was not political, but spiritual.

They needed to be set free from sin and death itself. And so when Jesus sang these words with his disciples, he knew the sacrifice he was to bring wasn't an animal, but himself.

[23 : 33] That he was bound to the altar of the cross. Also in him, his people can go through the gates of heaven into the presence of God.

Not because of our own righteousness, but through Jesus' righteousness given to us when we trust in his death.

And so the psalm then ends how it starts. A call for thankfulness in the goodness of God. That seen in his faithful love to his people, bringing them free salvation in the salvation of their king.

rescuing them forever. And so the writer of this psalm invites us to share their joy in the future that has been secured for us.

A future, not in this life, but a future beyond death into eternity. In 1745, a French pastor, Louis Rang, was condemned to die in Grenoble or refusing to renounce his faith.

[24 : 44] As he was led to the scaffold, he was singing verse 24. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

A few weeks later, an elderly French pastor, Jack Roger, was led to his execution. He again sang that verse. Then a third pastor, Francois Rochette, mounted the scaffolds, singing those words. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. If you're watching on, you might think, today of all days is not a day to be glad and to rejoice.

But those pastors were convinced that the day of salvation had arrived. They could sing those words and mean them because a future beyond death had been secured for them.

Now, few of us will face such opposition and suffering, but in the trials that come our way, in the bad days we still have when we're feeling drained, bruised, stressed, exhausted, we can still rejoice in the day the Lord has made.

[26 : 08] The price of sin has been paid. Death has been defeated. Satan has been brought down. The king has been vindicated. He is now the cornerstone and there is life forever.

For everyone who comes to this king, who puts their trust in him, who builds their life around him. And so we can join in saying verse 28 and 29 with grateful and thankful hearts, even in a pandemic. Now, the word extol in those verses is a strange word to our modern ears. To extol someone is to ascribe glory, worship and honour to another with great joy.

That we are to extol the Lord for our salvation in his king. He became the festal sacrifice for our deliverance and celebration.

Why not this week, over Easter week, take time to read over Psalm 118 bit by bit. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

[27 : 21] So as we close, let's say verse 28 and 29 together of our reading. You are my God and I will give thanks to you.

You are my God, I will extol you. Oh, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let me lead us in a prayer. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that in Jesus, in his victory on Easter Sunday is our victory.

His salvation is our salvation. We thank you that you have been so good to us in your steadfast love endures forever.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.