

Rejected but Marvellous

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'm sure you've all noticed, but there's Star Wars mania at the moment. I've got some Chewbacca socks for Christmas, a Chewbacca hoodie, which I wore to Episode 7 last night.

So I really couldn't resist doing this as an introduction. Don't worry, there are no spoilers here, so rest easy. But what you're going to hear, and what I'm going to ask Andre to play through the audio, are the closing credits for the first ever Star Wars movie.

That's Episode 4, not just yet Andre, A New Hope. The scene is the throne room, where Han Solo, Chewbacca, and Luke Skywalker are about to be awarded for destroying the Death Star.

Some of you might remember that. I'll play just two or three minutes of it, but as you hear it, what I want you to try and do is to recognize the various motifs in the music.

The motifs are the different melodies or harmonies that are used repeatedly throughout the movie. All right, we're not going to hear the whole thing. It's about five minutes. We're just going to hear about two or three minutes of it. So close your eyes if you need to.

[1 : 0 8] The motifs are the ones modes. We'll see you next time.

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The End The End The Lord is there with them, as we saw in Psalm 110, fighting alongside them.

And despite being outnumbered, this enables Israel to defeat the nations. And so we move on to the end of the Lord, the end of the Lord, the end of the Lord has done and the end of the end of the day, and the ■■ the city, open to me the gates of the righteous, I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

Many see Psalm 118 as a sort of a processional psalm, that's what it's being used for, where returning armies would sing this psalm as they entered the city. The gates are shut, probably because the city needs to be fortified against the enemies, but now that victory is achieved, the psalmist calls out for the people to open the gates and let them in so that they can enter to thank the Lord. And in fact, if you look right down to the end in verse 29, we see them, what they're doing is that the procession is headed to the temple. For in verse 29, the people who are presumably lining the route are being urged to join the festal procession with tree branches or boughs in hand all the way to the altar, and the altar, of course, is in the temple. So it's sort of a scene that's reminiscent of a ticker tape parade, as it were. I've got a picture of one when, you know, a country perhaps wins the World Cup or whatever, people line the streets, maybe even in the balconies to welcome the team home. That's the picture there. Well, here the leader and his army are singing songs as they go, perhaps even singing this psalm as they make their way to the temple, and what they're doing is they're recounting or telling the people of the city God's mighty deeds out in the battlefield. And in this second section, the psalm becomes responsive. So in verse 19, it begins with the leader's voice. He speaks, but then verse 20, the people respond with, this is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. And it goes on like that through the rest of the psalm. But what I want you to notice here is that the leader and his army are being described as the righteous.

[15 : 05] That's what they already called. They've called themselves the righteous in verse 15 when they were singing songs in the tents. But here again, they are being referred to as the righteous.

And so the leader is, as it were, the model of what righteousness should be. This is what the righteous looks like. And if we join the dots, he's being equated with the person that was described in Psalm 112, if you remember from a few weeks ago. Remember how in that psalm, the righteous is the one who is like the Lord, who fears the Lord, and who delights in his commands.

Well, to that, we now have another few more characteristics of the righteous. And he's the one who takes refuge in the Lord. He's the one who trusts in him. He's the one who calls on his name. The righteous is the one that the Lord is with and whom the Lord saves when he calls.

But what we also now learn is that this righteous leader is not only the recipient of salvation. He says the Lord has saved him on the battlefield. He also is the agent of the Lord's salvation.

You see, by saving him in the battle, the Lord also saves the people through him. The Lord has used him to defeat Israel's enemies and thus bring salvation to the people.

[16 : 31] And you can see the people acknowledging this. So look with me at verse 21. In verse 21, the leader is speaking of his own salvation. But when we get to verse 22, there's again another change in the voice.

And the people speak from verses 22 to 27. And what they say is that they see in their leader someone that the Lord has used to save them. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice together and be glad. Let us rejoice today and be glad. Now the stone being referred to here is the leader.

He is seen as the cornerstone, that critical piece that holds up the whole building. That's what the cornerstone is. And he's the cornerstone because he's the crucial agent of God's victory.

The key point of the verse, however, is this. That God's way of working is to choose those who are rejected by the powers to be. Here the leader is rejected by the nations around them, the more powerful nations as it were.

[17 : 33] But God raises him up to be his agent of salvation. And so when the people next cry, Lord save us, Lord grant our success, they are looking to this rejected stone for salvation.

He is the one who comes in the name of the Lord as God's chosen one. And they bless him from the house of the Lord. So the next few verses say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord from the house of the Lord.

We bless you. The Lord is God and he has made his light shine upon us. And so as this leader enters the city, he brings with him the victory he has just won in the name of the Lord.

He carries with him, as it were, the light, which is the Lord himself. Now tradition has it that this psalm is sung at key festivals in the life of Israel. In particular, during the Passover and the Feast of the Tabernacles.

In fact, Psalm 113 to 18, all those six psalms are sung together as a group, as part of those festivals. And both these festivals commemorate, as many of you would know, the Exodus, Israel's great victory over Egypt, Israel's escape from slavery.

[18 : 42] And so as the people sung this year in, year out, they would have carried the hope of physical or military victories, just like the one in the Exodus. They hoped that God would raise yet another human leader like Moses to lead them to victory.

And they thought, when Jesus arrived on the scene, that he was that leader. Remember, he was really popular at the start, wasn't he? Crowds came to hear him when he first appeared.

And so when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people actually welcomed him with the words of this psalm. And in particular with verses 26 and 27.

So significant was this event, that actually all the four Gospels record this very incident. But we're just going to hear from the Gospel of Matthew today. So I'm going to get Jasmine to come up.

But as she does, please turn with me to chapter 21 of Matthew. And we'll have our second reading for today. Matthew 21, verses 1 to 11. The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

[20 : 20] They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and those who followed shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, Who is this? The crowd answered, This is Jesus, the prophet from the Nazareth in Galilee.

Here I'm still reading. So you can see, can't you, that what Jesus did actually re-enacts Psalm 118.

Now the word Hosanna, in case you're not familiar, simply means save us in Hebrew. The exact words of verse 26. And then in verse 27, they even enact the psalm by spreading branches on the road for Jesus.

[21 : 22] But I guess what they forgot was, what the people forgot was, verse 22 of the psalm. They wanted only an all-powerful military leader. But they forgot that God's chief cornerstone, the Lord's chief cornerstone, would end up being rejected.

In fact, Jesus knew full well of the content of Psalm 118, and verse 22 in particular, because in the very next chapter of Matthew, chapter 22, if you've lost it, you still have your finger there, just turn over.

He quotes it as he tells the parable of the wicked tenants. Jesus knew that he would be rejected by the Jewish and Roman leaders. He knew that they would send him to the cross to die.

And unlike the military leader in the Old Testament, Jesus knew that the victory for him comes not in the defeat of physical enemies, but of the enemies of sin and death. And that's why he had to go to the cross.

He had to be rejected. And friends, in light of Jesus' death on the cross, we can see exactly what Jesus has done. And so, like verse 23 of Psalm 118, we can proclaim that it is marvelous to our eyes.

[22 : 37] In fact, with Christmas just passed, we have just been rejoicing, haven't we, at his coming, at his coming in the name of the Lord. We have been singing carols to proclaim that very fact.

And I guess that is what the Psalm urges us to do today, to give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures forever. Because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, rejected, yet chosen by God as the chief cornerstone, key to God's purpose of salvation, we are able to be thankful for our salvation.

We are also able to be thankful for God's continued goodness because we are saved in Christ for all the other good things in our lives, all that God continues to do because of his hesed for us.

So Christ is with us by his Spirit. And he continues to help us to grow in our faith, to make us more like him, to serve others, to tell others about Jesus.

And so as we come to the end of another year, let us give thanks to the Lord for what he has done for us on the cross, but also during the year. So that's the first thing I would like to do tonight.

[23 : 53] But there is also a second reminder in this Psalm, isn't there? And that is God's way of salvation. The fact that God chooses those that are rejected by the world to achieve his plans.

Jesus is the clearest example of that. But we too, as his disciples, we too will end up being rejected by the world. And we need to be prepared for that and to accept that.

And I guess even be glad to see that that's God's way of working. Whether we see ourselves as leaders or not, like this Psalm, we are likely to, from time to time, be surrounded by enemies, those who reject the name of the Lord.

That shouldn't fill us with discouragement. In fact, it should give us encouragement or hope because it shows that the Lord is using us for his purpose. We may not be the chief cornerstone like Jesus is, but we are still living stones which God is using to build a spiritual house.

Peter, in his letter, his first letter, in chapter 2 and verse 4, says this very thing. And I've got the verse on the slide. As you come to him, the living stone rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[25 : 22] So friends, as we head into a new year, let us remember that. Whatever the future may hold, let us know that God's purpose is to use us as living stones, rejected though we may be by the world.

And so let us take refuge in the Lord. Let us trust in him and not humans. Let us call on his name and then see what mighty things his right hand will achieve. So what I want to do tonight, which is a bit different, is for us to just conclude in prayer, to pray in sort of groups, small groups, maybe four or five to a group.

Now if you're new here or visiting and you're not comfortable to pray aloud, that's fine, you don't need to, but join one of the groups anyway. And so what we'll do is we'll just huddle over the next two or three minutes and pray for those two things.

Firstly, to give thanks to the Lord for his enduring love and then secondly, to remind ourselves to keep trusting in the Lord even in the face of rejection and persecution.

Let's do that right now.