

# Christ Our Cornerstone (8:00 am Service)

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Preacher: Ben Short

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I'll pray for us as we continue to stand. Father, we thank you for time this morning. We thank you for your scriptures that speak to us.

I ask that you will open our hearts to receive your word this morning. Amen. Please take a seat.

Well, good morning. Good morning. Nice to see everybody.

What a privilege to look at this psalm, Psalm 118. There's lots of psalms and they're all great. And it's good to look at this one. Let's begin with an imagination exercise.

I would like you to imagine that you are an Israelite 2,700 years ago. And our king has gone off to war. Now, this is not David smiting our neighbors.

This is no longer the glory days of Israel. Now, this is our king gone out to fight a massive enemy.

We are now in the age of the great superpower Assyria.

[ 1 : 06 ] And they are Assyria the Great who have conquered little nation after little nation. And we are meant to be just one more. And when we hear that name, Tiglath Pileser III, our spines chill because we know what those men and that king has done.

But our king, surprisingly, and through the power of God, has gone out and defeated our enemy.

And our king comes back. And God has given the victory to us.

And we're safe. And it's really wonderful. And the king decides to celebrate this victory with a huge festival and a procession.

And there's a kind of event that happens in Israel when these victories happen. And we are beginning this procession.

And what happens is the whole city, tens, maybe hundreds of thousands of people, gather outside Jerusalem, the city walls. And you can just imagine kind of the morning.

[ 2 : 13 ] The sun's just come out. It's a little bit hot. We can scattle and you can smell the cattle around. There's a cool breeze. And the king stands up and speaks the words of verse 1.

He says, Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever. And he says, Let Israel say, And then Israel, all of us, respond, His steadfast love endures forever.

And then the king calls to the priests. And he says, Let the house of Aaron say, And the priests all say, His steadfast love endures forever. And then he says, Let those who fear the Lord say, And we say, His steadfast love endures forever.

And then from verse 5 on, Is the king making a declaration of what's happened. And what's happened is, God has delivered us. And God has delivered him.

And all the way down to verse 18 is the king speaking. And we need to imagine we're walking through the streets of Jerusalem. And the king is very loudly speaking these words.

[ 3 : 23 ] And then verse 19 is kind of a transition verse. The king says, Open to me the gates of righteousness. And what's happened is, We have got to the entrance of the temple courtyard.

And he calls to the people inside the temple, Open to me these gates. And then he says some more stuff. And we go in. And then verse 25 is all of us together speaking.

We're together in the courtyards. And we say, Save us, we pray, O Lord. Which is the verses we know in the New Testament. That is Hosanna. O Lord we pray success.

And the rest of it is probably all of us calling together. Okay, a little fun imagination exercise. So this psalm is some sort of celebration.

A liturgy, a procession, A celebration of a victory together. God has given salvation to his people. And the main tone of this is joy and thanks.

[ 4 : 26 ] It's thanksgiving. Perhaps we could pick verse 21 as kind of the summary verse of the psalm. Verse 21, I thank you that you have answered me.

And have become my salvation. Yes, this is a psalm of thanksgiving. It is joyful. It is loud. It is exuberance. And we will learn today about thanksgiving.

And I want to say two things. Thanksgiving is a posture. Thanksgiving is a response. Those are the two things I'm going to say. Thanksgiving is a posture. Thanksgiving is a response.

And just an interesting fact. This psalm is associated with the Exodus. Actually, Psalms 113 to 118 were read by the Israelites during the Passover.

When they remembered the Exodus event, they would read out this kind of chunk of, is it six or seven psalms? 113 and 114 before the Passover dinner. Then they have the dinner.

[ 5 : 29 ] And then 115 to 118, they would read after the Passover dinner. It's kind of an interesting fact. Kind of interesting. Okay, so I've got two points. The first one is, Thanksgiving is a posture.

What do I mean? When we think about our life and issues, sometimes it's helpful to distinguish between gestures and postures. A gesture is a single act that I do.

And a posture is the disposition I take to thinking about an issue. So, for example, an issue might be technology. And maybe I take different acts. But what is the posture I take towards technology? And people take all kinds of postures. And that's an interesting discussion. And it's helpful to distinguish between just a single act of my posture. And Thanksgiving is both a gesture and a posture.

Even an ungrateful person can make a single act of thanksgiving. But when we say someone is ungrateful, what we're saying is that their posture is one of not having thanks generally.

[ 6 : 32 ] And in this psalm, we see both. We see an act of thanksgiving and a posture of thanksgiving. So, for example, write in verse 1.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever. So, verse 1 is an act of thanksgiving. The king stands up and he says, Thanks be to God.

And he thanks God for his steadfast love. I remember once when I was reading through the Old Testament, not in one sitting, over a couple of months, I had read in the Exodus, which talks about God's character.

God is full of steadfast love, forgiving the generation and generation. And then after Exodus, I was reading the story of Israel, like Judges and Joshua and the story of the kings.

And I remember thinking as I read those stories, over a period of weeks, man, God has a lot of patience. Like the people of Israel, many, many, many, many times, just do all kinds of stupid stuff.

[ 7 : 43 ] And God keeps forgiving them. I thought, gee, God is steadfast and his love endures forever. I thought, oh, that's what Exodus said. God is steadfast in love and his love endures forever.

And it's true. And in verse 1, the king says, let us make an act of thanksgiving. Also verse 19. 19's great.

Open the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. And he says, I'm going to give this great big act of thanks. And maybe one thing that we should do after we read this psalm is to go home in our prayers, make an act of thanks.

We could take a verse from this psalm and pray it to God. I commend to you verse 28. Verse 28 says, you are my God and I will give thanks to you.

You are my God and I will extol you. And maybe you could take that verse and, in your own private prayers, just say that to God and thank him. However, in this psalm, there's also gestures of thanksgiving.

[ 8 : 48 ] Sorry, sorry. Not just gestures, but postures of thanksgiving. Because gestures come out of a heart that knows who God is to me. So we go with verse 14.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. The Lord is my strength because he gives victory to me. And he is my song because after victory, I'm happy and I want to sing.

And this king knows, not just that we make single acts of thanksgiving, but God is always for him. And this king is always thankful.

Again, verse 8 and 9. 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.

And this is a posture. A thankful heart is something that we have inside of us. It is a lens through which we see the world. The world, sorry.

[ 9 : 52 ] And the word. A thankful heart is a story that the good things in my life are gifts. And they are bigger and better than the bad things in my life. A thankful heart is a palette through which I paint.

The colors that I use. A thankful heart is an instrument that I use to make the music of my life. Yes, here is a man who has a thankful heart.

His heart is thankful to God. New Testament makes much of thanksgiving. In Ephesians 5 verse 4, Paul says this.

Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead, let there be thankfulness.

Ephesians 5 verse 4. And I take it, the point is, when you have a heart that's thankful, you won't be able to make crude talk, foolish joking, filthiness.

[ 10 : 51 ] And when you are making filthiness, crude talk, foolish joking, you don't have a thankful heart. Those things can't go together. When we have a heart that is deeply shaped by thanksgiving and the knowledge of who God is to us, it will shape our life.

I read an illustration about this a while ago. There is a book called Culture Making by a writer called Andy Crouch. My father can't say his name because there is a Christian artist from I think the 70s called Andre Crouch.

And dad just can't say the name Andy Crouch because all he can say is Andre Crouch. They are quite different people. Andy Crouch used to work at Harvard as a campus pastor for university students.

And he observed, after working there for some years, that there are different kinds of students who get into Harvard. It's a really interesting observation.

A lot of the students he met he called the strivers. They are the students who worked night and day. They took all those preparation classes and they worked really hard.

[ 12 : 02 ] And they earned their way into Harvard. You know, they got the scholarships. And these are not the ones that went to like other universities. They got into Harvard. And the second kind of students are the legacies.

The legacies are there because of some kind of legacy. Their parents probably went to Harvard and they've got some kind of celebrity or wealth or influence in their background.

And the people who are strivers are characterized by anxiety because they're worried about everything. And the people who are legacies are characterized by dominance because they're strong.

I'm going to read from him now. He says, After a few years, though, I realized there was a third group, a smaller one than the first two groups. They arrived at Harvard seeming nothing but delighted and surprised at the letter they had landed in their mailbox on a spring day.

I met students who hadn't even thought to apply to Harvard until their high school guidance counselor suggested it, including a few who were the first in their whole extended family to ever go away to college.

[ 13 : 13 ] They could have their moments of anxiety or they could be perfectly self-assured. But what you remembered about them was the lightness in their manner, a sense of fun and even play that accompanied them into the dining room, the classroom, and the lab.

Not the play of the entitled who were at Harvard, more for the social capital than schoolwork, just the enjoyment of a very good life of studying, learning, and growing that could be found at any college at its best.

I came to think of these students as children of grace. Of all the students I met who received the coveted summa cum laude for their senior thesis, nearly everyone was in this third group, neither a striver nor a legacy, but a quietly brilliant child of grace.

Now that is an interesting observation, and I think it is a great illustration for our life. What is the lens through which we see our life? Is the Lord the song and strength of my life?

What is the driving story? Is the story of my life that really I need to earn my way here? I earn my way in the world. Or is the story really I deserve this?

[ 14 : 30 ] I deserve better. Or is the story of my life this is a gift, and I'm thankful. The New Testament connects idolatry and thanksgiving as the polar opposites.

The opposite of idolatry is giving thanks. It's in Romans 1. And that's exactly why we have verse 8. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

If we trust in God, that we will have a heart that is thankful. So my first point is that thanksgiving is a posture. My second is thanksgiving is a response.

So if thanksgiving is a posture in my heart, it comes because I'm responding to something outside of me. For the psalmist, it's salvation.

A military victory. Verse 10. All the nations surrounded me. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. And the psalmist knows that he has salvation because God is on his side.

[15:32] Verse 5. 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 for me?

The word distress has the feeling of walls closing in. It's a claustrophobic word. And the word set me free is kind of an interesting one.

It means I've been set on an open place and given an open feeling to my life. The freedom that God gives is a freedom of openness. And God has worked salvation for his people.

This is the pattern of the Bible. I said this is a psalmist associated with the Exodus. Actually, verse 14, the Lord is my strength and my song, is a quote from Exodus chapter 15.

And the first great work of salvation that the Old Testament remembers is the Exodus. And that is the first work of salvation, the kind of archetypical one. The second work of salvation is the one here, another one that God is doing for the king.

[16:37] He has worked salvation for him. And the thing is that God's salvation is a surprising thing. Verse 22, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. Yes, the point of this is that there is a stone which doesn't look very good and the builders have rejected it, but it's become the most important thing.

And initially, this is talking about Israel. The great nations pass by Israel and they think this silly little nation that can't do anything, we're just going to pass them by. And God has chosen Israel and they have become the cornerstone.

And no wonder, this is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. They had nothing. They saw we could do nothing against these nations.

But God's salvation is wonderful. And yes, this is the pattern of salvation. God did it again in Jesus Christ. Yes, this psalm is about Jesus.

[17:43] It is about Jesus Christ. Very famously, this verse 22 is quoted by Jesus. Imagine being a disciple in the last week of Jesus' life.

This psalm comes up three times in the end of Jesus' life. On Sunday, when Jesus enters into Jerusalem, the people find themselves quoting this psalm.

Verse 25, in the Greek, in the New Testament, it says, Hosanna. But they're quoting this verse 25. Save us, Lord, we pray. Save us. On Tuesday, so that's the Sunday, two days later, on the Tuesday, Jesus stands up and tells a parable about how Israel have rejected Jesus.

And he finishes by quoting this verse. The stone, the bill is rejected, has become the cornerstone. And the point is that the salvation that God gives is through Jesus, and it is utterly surprising.

It is totally different than what we would expect. And the last one, the third time, is on the Thursday, on the night of the Last Supper, before Jesus died.

[18:56] You remember that little verse in Mark, where it says, they sung a hymn and they went out. This is probably the psalm they sung. These are the psalms of the Passover.

And they probably read out Psalm 118. And we, if we are Christians, have received the salvation of God through Jesus Christ. And we have a reason to say, verse 6, the Lord is on my side.

I will not fear. What can anybody do to me? Yes, as Paul says in Romans chapter 6, thanks be to God that you were once slaves of sin and have become obedient from the heart and we have been set free.

Yes, thanks be to God. Thanksgiving is a response to God. If the song of my salvation, if the song of Jesus is the song of my heart, then my posture will become thankfulness.

No matter what happens in my life, if I know that God is for me and nothing can happen to me outside, then I will rejoice and be glad. I'm going to finish by reading out another little section from this Andy Crouch.

[20:21] He says about the students, the funny thing is that every Harvard undergraduate could be a child of grace. Remember, the three, the strivers, the legacies, and the children of grace.

Harvard admits about 10% of the high school students who apply in a given year. In the remaining 90% are strivers. Every bit as driven and talented as the strivers in the 10% who got in.

In that 90% who don't get in are plenty of children of alumni. The famous and the wealthy. There is no one in any class at Harvard who could not have been replaced by someone else equally gifted or connected.

A great deal of luck weaves its way through the process of application. For that matter, no one even gets the chance to apply for Harvard without an extraordinary number of lucky breaks.

My colleges and campus ministries and other universities would talk about the stress of divorce, blended families, their students, but I rarely met a student whose family of origin was not intact at Harvard.

[ 21 : 28 ] Students at Harvard are disproportionately oldest or only children, recipients of plenty of undivided attention. Just to buy a ticket into the lottery that is the Ivy League admission process, you have to win a series of lotteries you did not even know existed.

Every student I met, anxious, confident, or otherwise, had been the recipient of a gift. Only a few of them knew it. Yes.

Friends, we have been given such a great gift in the salvation of Jesus Christ. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 22 : 27 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.