

Christ Our Cornerstone

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 July 2017

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Okay, well, let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name, amen. Right, so this is the last week in our series in Psalms, and obviously we're looking at Psalm 118 today.

Probably super helpful to have your Bibles open or an app open because we'll be digging into it. The Psalm was most likely some type of liturgy used way back in the days.

So part of some festival celebrating a great victory, and it led by a king, and the king would sort of quarterback the whole event. And the main concern of the Psalm is giving thanks to God, and we know that because the Psalm is enveloped by it.

So verses 1 to 4 and verse 29, Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. God is good. I love that line. I love that first line.

God is good. Now, do you notice that it doesn't say God is great? You notice it doesn't say God is mighty or God is the boss. Now, God is all of those things.

[1 : 08] But here it says God is good. So what does that mean? Well, good in English is a fairly sort of weak kind of word, isn't it? It sort of means above average, something like that.

The Hebrew word translated good here, though, is wonderful and rich, and it has this medley of concepts in it. It means morally good and pure like you would sort of think it does.

But it also means kind, and it also means beautiful. And so you have all these ideas floating around in this word, captured by this word.

God is good because he's beautiful, and he's beautiful because he's good. And all those ideas are kind of mushed together in this just one word good. So the king, the liturgist, you know, back in the days, he's leading a procession, and he's heading to a temple most likely, and he's urging his people, and he's saying to them, okay, let's give thanks to God for he is kind, and he is beautiful, and he is good.

And what does that goodness look like? What does that beauty look like? What does that kindness look like? It looks like steadfast love. But before we talk about that, let's look at the first few words of verse one, because those ones we kind of skip over really quickly, and I think they're really cool.

[2 : 24] The first few words are this, oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. Now, let's give thanks. That's a doing word, isn't it? Like, that's a, you do that.

Gratefulness is nice. We should be grateful, people. But giving thanks, that's another thing.

Gratitude you feel. Thanksgiving is something you do. So the king here, or the liturgist, whoever it was, in verse two, he's saying to the crowd, we see, look at verse two, that he says to the crowd, let's do something together.

Let's shout some stuff out together. And he says, let's all say this, let's all say this, let's all say, his steadfast love endures forever. Let's all say it together. But first, he sort of picks out these different groups.

He goes, okay, the Israelites, you say it first. Steadfast love endures forever. But now the house of Aaron, now you say it next. And that was the priestly class. Those were all sort of the minister sort of tribe right there.

Now you guys say it together. That's verse three. And verse four, now let's all say it together. His steadfast love endures forever. Thanksgiving. It's a doing word. Let's do it.

[3 : 32] So let's move on now. What were they so thankful for? Well, folks, if you ever decide to put some time aside to study, like, just a single word. If you thought to yourself, I'm going to commit a night to just study one single Bible word, a word that should be near the top of that list is the word hesed.

And it's the Hebrew word translated steadfast love. And it's very, it's pretty untranslatable, but our best effort is sort of steadfast love. Other versions use the word, the phrase loving kindness. Now, what does it mean? When we say things like God is love, which is a Bible phrase, even agnostics kind of can sort of agree with that, you know.

Many agnostics would probably say, yeah, if there is a God, he's a God of love. And often what people mean by that is God is loving, which means that he kind of lets me do my thing. I can be true to myself. And God does his thing and I do my thing. And we've got this good thing going on here. God is love. You know, God is love. That's not love. That's indifference. See, God's love is hesed love.

[4 : 46] It's not a love that leaves us alone. And until we understand the richness of what steadfast love is, hesed love is, we'll be unchanged by it. So he said love.

What is it? What's steadfast love? God's steadfast love is a love that doesn't let go of you. It's God's refusal to wash his hands of us.

Despite our wanderings, despite disobedience, is it's his persistent loyalty to his people, to us, even when we are so and we are undeserving of it.

God's hesed love is steadfast love is one of the greatest wonders of the universe. And we would be tempted not to believe it, except that story after story after story of the Bible speaks to it and proclaims it.

So the story of Hosea, the prophet. Hosea was called by God to marry somebody specifically, this woman, who was basically a prostitute.

[5 : 55] Her name was Goma. Now, very interesting book of the Bible, this. Who are we in that story? We are Goma. We are Goma the adulteress.

And it's a hard book to read. You know, these guys get married and kids are produced. A lot of question marks over who the father of these children are.

Because this woman keeps running into the arms of other men. But at the end of the first section of the book, sort of chapter two, it doesn't say, so I got rid of her.

It says, I'll win her back. And the message version, it's delightful. It sort of goes through, Hosea, the beginning of chapter two, outlines all the terrible stuff she's done.

Hosea's wife, Goma, all the terrible stuff she's done. And then it says, and in the message version, it says this, and now, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to start all over again. I'm taking her back out into the wilderness, where we had our first date, and I'll court her, and I'll give her bouquets of roses, and I'll turn heartbreak Ellie into acres of hope.

[7 : 05] And she'll respond like she did as a young girl those days when she was fresh out of Egypt. See, that's Hesed love, the God who pursues when we don't deserve.

The story of Jonah, and that story, who are we? We're Nineveh. We're a city so wicked, yet God loved that city, and he pursued that city through Jonah, who was pretty useless.

We're the prodigal son, and the father stands on his porch longing for us to come home. In the story of David and Goliath, you know the story, right? Who are we?

We're the soldiers on the sideline, fearful. We don't believe God loves us enough to save us, so we don't enter the battle, so God sends a boy, just a boy, and saves us anyway.

Hesed love. It's God's loyal love and pursuit of his people, no matter what. Israel's lack of faith and waywardness could not trump God's Hesed love for them, and it can't trump ours.

[8 : 11] Like, you might think, well, you don't know, Aaron. I'm pretty disobedient. I'm pretty... I've done some bad stuff. Like, I still do some bad. If you think your waywardness can trump God's love, look at the cross.

Can you beat that? See, God's steadfast love is so shocking, and it's so scandalous. It's hard to get our head around it, because it breaks all the normal rules of what love should look like, but it's real. It's the story of the Bible. Okay, so... So the king in the psalm is, you know, as I said, he's probably leading this liturgy, and he's getting the...

leads a chorus of the Israelites, and they're all saying his steadfast love endures forever, which is wonderful, and you can imagine someone in the crowd shouting this out, and others are not so much into it, and that's just like church, isn't it?

You know, like, we come with lots of stuff going on, and some of us are belting out the songs, and some of us are feeling a bit lethargic about the whole thing. We can struggle with thanksgiving, can't we?

[9 : 11] And there's lots of reasons for that. Let me give you one reason as it relates to our passage here. I think one of the reasons we struggle with giving thanks, verbally doing the thing of giving thanks to God is we forget the cost to God in pursuing us.

To frame it in terms of the gospel, we don't understand or we forget that a great debt has been paid. We become immune to the size of that debt paid that brought us life with God.

I heard this story recently. I thought it was helpful. Let's say I'm away on vacation, and I ask my neighbor to collect my mail. And now imagine he comes back. I come back after a week, and he says to me, listen, while you're gone, you just got one letter, and it was a bill, and I wanted to do something nice for you, so I paid the bill for you.

Now, I would be grateful, but how grateful I would be will depend on the size of the bill that my friend paid. If it was the heating bill at this time of the year, you know, that's kind of like, oh, thanks, okay.

If it was the property tax bill, that's a whole different story, isn't it? See, my reaction, my thanksgiving hinges on the size of the debt paid.

[10 : 32] When it's in our hearts not to give thanks to God, and that's a persistent and a consistent thing in our life, it's because we have forgotten how great a debt has been paid so that we can have life with God.

Now, back to the passage. So we have a king in our psalm. He's urging the crowd to thank God and thank God for saving them and to remind them, especially the more lethargic ones, about how great a salvation it was.

He tells them the story of what happened, verses 10 to 14. That's what it's about, and that's how it relates to the thing I just mentioned here. So he's speaking as an individual here. And he's saying, listen, I was in a really bad situation.

Let me tell you about it. Let me remind you of why we're thanking God, why our thanksgiving has to be so profound. So he paints a picture. He says, I'm there, and all of the nations are surrounding me, and there were like a swarm of bees, and they moved like a scrub fire in a really dry place, and I was falling, but I defeated them against all the odds.

I defeated them. And verse 15 and 17, remind them that it wasn't due to this particular king's military cunning, but it was God. It was all God. And this is why we should be thankful to God, the king says.

[11 : 45] We were going to die. We were all going to die, but we were saved, and we were rescued, and it was nothing to do with our efforts. It was all God. It was the God who pursues us and saves us.

Folks, when you understand that, when you understand the gospel in those terms, when you get that, it changes us. It changes our hearts.

It changes the way we want to live, and that's what verses six to nine are. So this king is reflecting on this great salvation. He's calling people to thank God with them for it, and then he says, let me tell you what I learned.

Let me tell you a few things that I learned as a result of that salvation. Let me read those verses to remind you of them. The Lord is on my side, all not fair. What can man do to me? Isn't that just fantastic, right?

The Lord is on my side. As my helper, I will 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.

[12 : 48] What's the first thing you learned? The Lord's on my side. What an immense truth to have in your hearts. No matter what, the Lord is on my side. And he says, moving forward, as a result of that, I'm going to live with less fear in my life.

With less anxiety. Because no matter what's going on, the Lord is on my side. You know, we are so trapped into, we'll call it horizontalism, okay?

Where we look, our horizon is just from here downwards. And we process all the stuff that's happening sort of here downwards. But we have the king of the universe who is on our side and is greater and more powerful than any circumstance.

So what else did the king learn? What else changed in him? Well, he was challenged to where to put his trust. So you know the bit about princes there? It's kind of unusual, right? It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

It's probably referring to a military strategy of getting himself out of trouble. So he's surrounded by these nations and he's thinking, I'm completely, this is all over. I know what I'll do. I'll just make some treaties with these pagan nations all around me.

[14:05] Which sounds like, oh, that's not a bad idea. Except it always ended badly for Israel because they always ended up importing those foreign nations gods. He was tempted to take a shortcut to solve his problem.

Folks, it's so easy to make deals, isn't it? So easy to make deals in our life. So easy to compromise because we don't want to trust the Father.

We don't want to trust the Father that he will sustain us if we remain single for the rest of our life. We just want a warm body in bed with us. It's easy to compromise in the area of money where we think, okay, I've chosen a job that doesn't earn a lot of money so I'm going to be incredibly tight. I'm not going to commit myself to the radical generosity that the gospel requires. I'm going to compromise. I'm going to hold it in so I don't trust God.

Folks, the king learned to trust God even when things were dire. That was his great learning. So in summary, verse six to nine, you can't understand this stuff.

[15:14] You can't believe this stuff and not be changed as well. Right, as I come to a close here, we've mostly talked about the passage in its original context but obviously, its greatest fulfillment is in Christ.

Now, this is not one of those things that a preacher does where he kind of preaches a passage and then he sort of tries to tack on Jesus right at the end so that everyone's cool with it, right? No, like it's not a tack on. The New Testament writers realize this.

You know, Psalm 118 is one of the most quoted Psalms in the New Testament. I'll give you an example. So Mark 12 rightfully quotes verse 22. Verse 22 is the one that says, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

They are saying, this is talking about Jesus. Now, if you're curious about that, I think this is what this means. So it's sort of like a mini story. You've got the stonemason, this builder, and he picks up a rock and he looks at it and he doesn't think much of it.

He throws it away in a trash pile. But that rock, turns out it's going to be the stone in the corner of a building which sets the level for the whole building, sets the integrity for the whole building.

[16:22] Now, in Psalm 118, it's about this great reversal of this king here. Surrounded by enemies, almost dying, then pulls out a huge win because of God. But the gospel writers saying that, you know, that whole thing operates on such a grander scale.

It's trying to tell us something about us and it's trying to tell us something about who Jesus is. That's what the gospel writers say. So in that mini story, who are we? We're the builders. We're the builders that had Jesus.

And what do we do with him? We throw him away. We put him on the trash pile. We reject him. But he's obviously the most important stone.

This one we threw away. The most important human being. And he's the key to everything. Now, as you hear these kind of accusations I'm kind of hitting you with, aren't you grateful for God's hesed love?

So it's easy to see while the New Testament writers look at Psalm 118 and say, this is the gospel. It's talking about the gospel in their ride. And I want to finish up here.

[17:28] So for those of you who like specific takeaways, you want to be able to write something down, you know, and go, okay, this is what I learned tonight. I'll leave you with one, right? One. I mean, I think you can go back and sort of think it through, but here's just one for you, right?

It's, I think the Psalm is telling us that out. One of our primary responses to the gospel is thanksgiving, is that we should be a people who are marked by thankfulness, not just gratitude. That's a good thing, but not just gratitude, but a doing thing, verbal thanksgiving. We're saying it to ourselves. We're saying it to each other. We're saying it to our family members.

Like this, like this verse from the passage here. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. It's a very famous line in the passage. It's an exclamation of thankfulness.

We should be saying that to each other, but not as a trite thing. It's not like, it's not a passage we say to thank God when it's really sunny, or it's not like a mantra that we say if we're having a hard time.

[18 : 31] It's telling us, in the context of the Psalm, it's saying every day, every single day, is a day we remember that we are saved people. Every day, our life should be marked with thanksgiving.

Thankfulness for God's pursuing, loyal, completely scandalous love for us. I love that. Cost him greatly.

Cost him his son. And when that truth sinks in our heart, when it does that, we're changed. We can be people that live less fearfully about the future, less fearfully about what's going on.

And when things do go sideways, we know we have a great God we can trust in. Amen? Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.