

# Psalm 118: A Hymn of Thanksgiving

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's guidance, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Psalms, Psalm 118, Psalm 118.

And if we take as our text this evening the words of verse 14. Psalm 118 and verse 14.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.

As you know, last Lord's Day morning we were looking at Mark chapter 14. And we were looking at what we called a scene of three providences.

There was a scene of the upper room where Jesus and his disciples ate their last supper together. And it was at that point which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for the first time.

[ 1 : 14 ] And it was a scene of three providences. We said that there was a providential promise in which Judas received the promise that he would be paid if he betrayed Jesus.

There was a providential preparation in which two of the disciples, they were sent ahead to prepare the Passover just as Jesus had told them. And then we saw that there was a providential Passover. In which the Passover that had been instituted 1500 years earlier as a memorial of the occasion when the angel of the Lord passed over all the houses in Egypt.

It was that occasion that was being superseded by the institution of the Lord's Supper. And where the Old Covenant was becoming New Covenant. Old Testament was becoming New Testament through the blood of the true Passover Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

But we also read in Mark's Gospel that after the Passover meal had been eaten and Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper, we're told that Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives.

[ 2 : 27 ] And the hymn which Jesus and his disciples sang was Psalm 118. And that's because Psalm 118 is part of a group of six psalms or six hymns which were traditionally sung during the Passover.

And there were six hymns called the Egyptian Hallel hymns. And there the psalms in the Psalter numbered from Psalm 113 to Psalm 118.

And of course they're called the Egyptian Hallel hymns because they recount the experience of the children of Israel as they were delivered from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

And they're called Hallel hymns from the word Hallelujah, which means praise the Lord. Because they praise the Lord for his great act of redemption in delivering the children of Israel out from the hands of Pharaoh and bringing them safely through the Red Sea on towards the promised land. They are the Egyptian Hallel hymns. But what's interesting is that when you place them within the context of the Passover meal which Jesus and his disciples partook of, it seems to bring the whole thing to life.

[ 3 : 46 ] Because if you remember when we were looking at the Passover the other day, we said that in the course of the Passover meal there were four cups.

Four cups filled with wine which were passed around the table. And each cup was associated with all the benefits that the children of Israel received from their deliverance out of Egypt.

And so when the Passover meal was prepared, it was prepared with the Passover lamb and the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. And there were other parts to the Passover meal but they were the main parts.

And at the beginning of the Passover meal it would begin by singing Psalm 113. Which begins with the word Hallelujah, praise the Lord. And it's a hymn that praises the Lord for his faithfulness towards his people.

And then after that hymn was sung, the first cup would be passed round the table. And the first cup was the cup of consecration. And the cup of consecration reminded the Jews that God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt because of his faithfulness to the covenant.

[ 4 : 57 ] Then they would sing Psalm 114. Which is a hymn that begins with the words when Israel went out from Egypt. And it's after that hymn was sung that the second cup of wine would be passed around the table.

And this was called the cup of release. And as the cup of release was passed around the table, they would retell the history of the Exodus. And then after that, after the story, they would eat the Passover lamb and with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs.

And then after the Passover meal was eaten, they would sing Psalm 115 and Psalm 116. Which are hymns that dedicate, it's a self-dedication to the Lord or commitment to the Lord.

Where it begins Psalm 115, not unto us Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. And Psalm 116, I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

But as you know, near the end of Psalm 116, it's in verse 13. It says, I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

[ 6 : 06 ] And it's after singing Psalm 116 that the third cup of wine is passed around the table. And the third cup of wine was called the cup of blessing or the cup of salvation.

And once the cup of salvation was passed around the table, they would sing Psalm 117. A short hymn about the coming Messiah. It's a, and the promise for blessing to all nations.

Praise the Lord, all nations, extol him, all peoples. And then after Psalm 117 was sung, the last cup, which was the cup of the Messiah.

Traditionally, the cup of the Messiah was just filled with wine and passed around the table. And no one would drink from it. Because the cup of the Messiah was not to be drunk until the Messiah would come and drink from it himself.

And of course, it was at that point that Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. Indicating the end of the Passover. He puts the Passover meal to one side and he takes bread.

[ 7 : 09 ] When he is given thanks, he breaks it and he gives it to his disciples saying, This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And after they had eaten, Jesus took the cup of the new covenant, the cup of the Messiah.

And he says that this cup is poured out for you. It's the new covenant in my blood. And it was after Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper for the first time that he and his disciples sang the last Egyptian Hallel hymn together.

Psalm 118. And as we said, it's a hymn of thanksgiving. But you know, when the disciples sang this hymn after the Lord's Supper had been instituted, they must have sung it with a new meaning and a new understanding.

But maybe it wasn't until later that they would realise how thankful they were and how thankful they ought to be for what Jesus had done on their behalf. And that's what it's like for many of us.

It's only when we look back. It's only when we look back and think about what the Lord has done that we are thankful for the Lord's provision. But as we come to look at this hymn of thanksgiving this evening, especially as this is our thanksgiving service, I don't want us to look at every section of this hymn or every verse.

[ 8 : 32 ] I would just like us to look at verse 14 in particular. And I'd like us to see that this confession in verse 14, it not only holds the entire hymn together, it also holds the entire history of the Israelites together.

The Lord is my strength and my salvation. He has become my son. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. And as you know, I like to use alliteration for my headings.

And you'll notice I didn't have to go very far to find some. Because this psalm has already given them to me. So the headings are, The Lord is my strength, the Lord is my song, and the Lord is my salvation.

The Lord is my strength, the Lord is my song, and the Lord is my salvation. So we look first at the Lord is my strength. The Lord is my strength. As we said, this confession in verse 14, it not only holds this entire hymn of thanksgiving together, but it also links the entire history of the children of Israel together.

It links the past with the present and the future. And I say that because even though these are Egyptian Hallel hymns, which focus upon the Passover, and they were sung during the Passover,

and they thank the Lord for his wonderful salvation and delivering the children of Israel from Egypt, even though they're all about that, the interesting thing about Psalm 118, is that it wasn't written at the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

[10:18] It wasn't written when the Passover was instituted, and the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. Because the reference to the cornerstone in verse 22, the stone that the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone.

Those words highlight that this hymn of thanksgiving was written long after the events of Egypt. And they seem to suggest that it was a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for the completion of a building. And it's for this reason that I believe that this hymn of thanksgiving was written when the temple had been rebuilt, after the children of Israel had returned from exile in Babylon.

So there's Egypt, and there's Babylon. And you'll remember that for centuries, all the way through the history of the children of Israel, the Lord had promised to his people that he would bring judgment upon them because of their idolatry.

And through many of the prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Hosea, the Lord promised through them that he would send his people into Babylon in order to discipline them.

[11:29] And that's what happened. And 586 BC came, and Nebuchadnezzar invaded Israel, and he destroyed Jerusalem, and he destroyed the temple.

And the Israelites, they were taken captive, often to Babylon, for 70 years. But after 70 years in the providence of God, the Israelites were delivered from Babylon, and they returned to their homeland, to the city of Jerusalem, and to rebuild the temple, and to rebuild the city.

And it was when the temple had been rebuilt, and it had been completed, that the hymn writer wrote this hymn of thanksgiving. He wrote it in thanksgiving to the Lord for his great act of salvation.

And that's what this hymn is all about. It's all about the Lord's deliverance of his people from the hand of their enemy. It's a hymn of thanksgiving. Because the return of the Israelites from exile in Babylon, it was another occasion of Israel's deliverance from bondage and slavery.

It was just, it was another experience of salvation. Just like it was with the Exodus from Egypt, when the Lord delivered the Israelites from slavery, and under the power of the Egyptians.

[12:46] He brought salvation. But the beauty of this hymn is the way in which it seems to link these two key moments of Israel's history together.

The deliverance from Egypt, and the deliverance from Babylon. They're at opposite ends of Israel's history. There's nearly a thousand years between these two occasions of salvation.

And yet what's remarkable is that the hymn writer manages to link these themes or these key moments of Israel's history by using one verse. Verse 14.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. And we'll see this link more closely in a moment. But I want to say, first of all, that this confession, the Lord is my strength.

It was the confession of the Lord's people in both periods of history. Whether it was the period of deliverance from Egypt or the period of deliverance from Babylon, it was the same confession.

[13:55] The Lord is my strength. And that's true with all of the Lord's people in whatever century. We all make the same confession as those who went before us.

And those who will come after us, they will also make the same confession about us and about our Lord. The Lord is my strength. Because every one of the Lord's people in whatever generation they're found in, they will be confessing, the Lord is my strength.

But the reason the Israelites could confess, the Lord is my strength, was not only because the Lord had delivered them from slavery and bondage and oppression from both Egypt and from Babylon, but because the Lord had provided for them in abundance.

He had abundantly provided for them. Because on the night that the children of Israel left Egypt, they didn't leave with nothing. They didn't leave empty-handed.

When they observed the Passover, they put the blood on the lintel and the doorposts of their house. The angel of the Lord passed over and the angel of the Lord killed the firstborn of every child and beast in Egypt.

[15:15] And when that happened, when there was this mass of death in Egypt on the Egyptian households, it was then that the Lord told the children of Israel, ask the Egyptians for gold, silver and clothing.

And they gave it to them. They gave them everything. And they left Egypt with lots and lots. They left Egypt with a mass amount of livestock, of gold, of silver, of clothing.

So they didn't leave empty-handed. And the same was true when the Israelites were delivered from Babylon. Because God in his mercy, he allowed a Persian king by the name of Cyrus to overthrow the powers of Babylon.

And Cyrus, he delivered the Israelites from Babylon. Then he issued a decree to them, saying to them that they must return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

And when Cyrus sent the Israelites back to Israel, he didn't send them back empty-handed. He sent them back with their pockets full of money and equipment and enough materials to rebuild the temple and to rebuild the walls and even men to help them do it.

[16:29] The Israelites were given everything they needed to get themselves back on their feet. And what they saw, in both periods of history, what they saw is that it all had been provided by the Lord.

And it's no wonder that the Lord's people, in whatever century they are in, they confess, the Lord is my strength. Because the Lord's people, they recognized that the Lord had not only provided salvation, but he had also provided all the temporal blessings which they needed.

And that's why this is such a wonderful hymn of thanksgiving. Because it calls all of the Lord's people, in every century, to give thanks to the Lord.

Not only for his salvation, but also for all the benefits of his salvation. Where we're to thank the Lord for his great provisions, both temporally and spiritually.

We are to be thankful people. And that's what the hymn writer does as he opens and closes this hymn of thanksgiving. He calls all of the Lord's people everywhere, in every generation, to give thanks to the Lord.

[17:42] That's what he says in verse 1. 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. And he closes the psalm with this great call to everyone. O give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

and that declaration of the Lord's enduring love it's certainly evident when we consider the two periods of deliverance from Egypt and from Babylon and yet what binds them together what binds these two great moments together is the Lord's enduring and unchanging love towards his people and that every blessing they received from the Lord whether temporal or spiritual it's a further demonstration of his love for them and you know my friend that's what we are given through Jesus Christ because through his work of salvation on the cross we experience or we receive every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ where we not only receive redemption but we also receive the benefits of that redemption we receive peace with God forgiveness of sin union with Christ adoption sanctification promise the promise of the resurrection the promise of of glory but more than that when our eyes are opened we're made to see that everything we have in life from our homes to our families to our job to our health to all the temporal gifts that we enjoy it's only then that we're enabled to see that everything comes from his hand every gift comes from his hand and that we are to be thankful for the Lord's provision and confess with all of the Lord's people in every century the Lord is my strength the Lord is my strength but secondly we see that all of the Lord's people confess the Lord is my song the Lord is my song the Lord is my strength and my song he has become my salvation and the second declaration the Lord is my song like the first it's also a declaration which was made after the Israelites had been delivered from exile in Babel they'd experienced the blessings of salvation from the oppressive hand of the Babylonians and they'd experienced all the benefits of that salvation as they'd returned to their homeland to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple and as you would expect such an act of deliverance by the Lord was expressed in worship and singing and that's what we're told in verse 15 it says glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous the right hand of the Lord does valiantly and there is as the psalmist says there is the sound of joyful singing in the tents of the righteous those who have been delivered by the hand of the Lord they've not yet rebuilt their homes they're intense but they're an expression expressions of worship and praise to the Lord for his display of love and faithfulness towards his people but as we said the beauty of this Egyptian Hallel hymn is the way in which it seeks to link the deliverance from Babylon with the deliverance from Egypt and it links these two key moments together which is nearly a millennium apart and it links them together by this one verse and I say that because this verse it was first sung on the banks of the Red Sea by Moses the

words the Lord is my strength and my song he has become my salvation because when the children of Israel when they observed the Passover and escaped from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea Moses sang a hymn of thanksgiving and it's recorded for us in Exodus 15 and it says just Exodus 15 verse 1 I'll sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea the Lord is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation and so one of the first things Moses sings about and confesses as the people of Israel are now free from slavery and bondage in Egypt they confess the Lord is my strength and my song he has become my salvation and it's a remarkable confession which links both acts of salvation together the salvation from Egypt and the salvation from Babylon and as we said this is the same confession in the Lord's people in both periods of history the same confession the Lord is my strength the Lord and his wonderful salvation is the theme and content of my song but this also means that what was said of the Israelites after deliverance from Babylon could also be said of the Israelites after deliverance from Egypt that glad songs of salvation that glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous there is the sound of joyful singing in the tents of the righteous as the children of Israel left Egypt they've left their homes in Egypt they're now dwelling in tents as they begin their journey towards the promised land and as they begin their journey there are expressions of worship and praise just like those who came out of Babylon expressions of worship and praise for the Lord's faithfulness and his love towards his people and what's remarkable is that through these words we're being reminded that the Lord's people in every century they testify and sing in thankfulness to the Lord for his wonderful salvation the content and theme of their singing is the Lord's salvation and that that salvation has been brought about by grace and grace alone and that's what the hymn writer says he actually says it in verse 15 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 three times in these two verses the hymn writer draws attention to the right hand of the Lord and it was the right hand of the Lord which brought about salvation from Egypt and salvation from Babylon from Babylon and the reference to the right hand of the Lord is repeated throughout the Bible because the right hand of the Lord was a position of exaltation it was the right hand of the king that was a position of exaltation it was a position which you couldn't earn it was given to you as a mark of favour and it was through the right hand of the king that you experienced blessing the blessing of receiving what you do not deserve and that's what the gospel does with us doesn't it it raises us to a position of exaltation that we are not worthy to receive and have done nothing to achieve it yet God blesses us and it's done as a mark of God's grace

God's blessing is a mark of God's grace being given to us and when we experience the grace of God in salvation just like the Israelites did we too can testify like all of the Lord's people and say with firm confidence with the psalmist I shall not die but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord I shall not die I shall not die but I shall live and you know it was because of those words that Martin Luther he said that Psalm 118 was his favourite psalm Martin Luther loved Psalm 118 and that's he wrote a 60 page exposition on this psalm I suppose that's why he loved it so much he wrote that but it was in the preface of his exposition of Psalm 118 that Luther wrote these words he says this is my own beloved psalm although the entire psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life

[ 26 : 56 ] I fell in love with this psalm especially therefore I call it my own when emperors and kings the wise and the learned and even saints could not aid me this psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles as a result it's dearer to me than all the wealth honour and power of the Pope the Turk and the Emperor and I would be most unwilling to trade this psalm for all of it and when you read the comments which Luther makes about this particular psalm he gives a glimpse into what went on in his own study when he was preparing this I'm sure he says that he had engraved on a plaque and hanging on this wall in the study the words of verse 17 I shall not die but live and Luther regarded this verse he says as a masterpiece he said all the saints have sung this verse and will continue to sing it until their end so far as the world is concerned the saints die yet their hearts say with a firm faith

I shall not die but live and you know my friend Luther was right the words of verse 17 they've been a comfort and a promise to many of the Lord's people down throughout the centuries because in these words we have presented to us the reversal of death and the destruction of the grave and that's what all of the Lord's people have clung to in the past and it's what they're still clinging to in

the present and it's what they will cling to in the future it's what they sang as they came out of deliverance in Egypt it's what they sang when they came out of exile in Babylon and it's what we're still singing tonight after our deliverance from sin at Calvary I shall not die but live and shall the works of God discover and it's no wonder to us then that this hymn writer wrote this great hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for his provision of salvation because it's the Lord alone who delivers his people from the hand of their enemies but it's this last declaration in verse 14 that's what pulls the entire history of the Lord's salvation together we've seen that all of the Lord's people in whatever century they are in they all confess the Lord is my strength the Lord is my song and the Lord is my salvation so lastly the Lord is my salvation the Lord is my strength and my song he has become my salvation and what I find amazing about this one verse is that it manages to pull the whole of redemptive history together the whole lot as we've seen they were first sung by Moses as a hymn of thanksgiving after they'd come out after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt then they're sung as a hymn of thanksgiving which was written after the Israelites were delivered from exile in Babylon but what makes me realize how wonderful and how beautiful the Bible is and how it all fits together so perfectly is that these words were also sung in a song of thanksgiving by the prophet Isaiah because in Isaiah chapter 12

Isaiah writes a song of thanksgiving for the Lord's provision of a saviour he says in verse 2 behold God is my salvation I will trust and will not be afraid for the Lord God is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation but what's interesting is that Isaiah's song in Isaiah chapter 12 the song of thanksgiving it was written at the end of a section in the book of Isaiah called the book of Emmanuel and as you can guess the book of Emmanuel spoke about the promise of the coming Messiah and the birth of a saviour and we're very familiar with the words of the book of Emmanuel especially at the run up to Christmas because in Isaiah chapter 7 which is the beginning of the book of Emmanuel we're told the Lord himself will give you a sign behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call his name Emmanuel then you go into chapter 9 of the book of Emmanuel and we have the well known prophecy for unto us a child is born unto us a son is given the government will be upon his shoulder and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor Mighty God the Everlasting Father the Prince of Peace and then in Isaiah chapter 11 we're given further direction as to who the Messiah will be because he says it shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse a branch shall grow out of his roots the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him the spirit of wisdom and understanding the spirit of counsel and might the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord and so at the end of the book of Emmanuel in Isaiah chapter 12 Isaiah sings this song of thanksgiving for the Lord's provision of a wonderful saviour and with that Isaiah confesses with all those who came out of Egypt and all those who came out of Babylon they confess the same confession of God's salvation the Lord is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation and what's remarkable is that these three songs of thanksgiving

Moses' song after the Exodus and Isaiah's song with the promise of the Messiah the song that came out of the exile in Babylon the exan and Babylon these three songs of thanksgiving they span hundreds of years and yet each of them confessed the same thing the Lord is my strength the Lord is my song and the Lord is my salvation every generation which quoted these precious words emphasizes to us that the God whom they worshipped in the past is the same God we worship today He hasn't changed and His work of salvation hasn't changed but what we ought to see is that the theme of these three songs is thankfulness for the Lord's salvation therefore the important word in the song is salvation the important word is salvation and the word salvation in the Hebrew language is the word you've probably heard it before the word Yeshua and it's also a word that can be translated Joshua or Jesus and so whether Moses, Isaiah and this hymn writer knew it or not each of them when they wrote their hymns of thanksgiving hundreds of years apart they were all confessing the same thing the Lord has become my Jesus the Lord has become my Jesus and that's what the angel of the Lord said to Joseph isn't it?

[ 34 : 31 ] Mary shall bring forth a son you shall call his name Jesus call his name Yeshua you shall call his name salvation why? because he shall save his people from their sins and that's what salvation is it's been delivered from bondage and slavery just like the children of Israel in Egypt just like the Israelites from Babylon they were delivered from bondage and slavery but of course Egypt and Babylon they were always illustrations of death and separation from God a death and separation which had come about because of sin and that's the way in which the New Testament describes the effects of sin upon mankind that we are in bondage and slavery to sin we are dead in our trespasses and sins we are separated and alienated from God but we're able to sing our hymn

