

Psalm 118: The Repetitive Half

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[0 : 00] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Psalms, Psalm 118.

Psalm 118, page 511 in the Church Bible. And if we read again, just verse 1.

Psalm 118 and verse 1. O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever. As you know, when it comes to being a parent or working with children, there are many positives.

Because children can be great fun. They can also be a good laugh, especially if you're having a bad day. They can keep you going. There are many positives with children.

[1 : 09] But one of the problems, one of the problems of being a parent or working with children or dealing with children is the fact that you have to constantly repeat yourself.

Maybe it's not true for other parents, but it's certainly true for me as a parent. You're constantly repeating yourself. Tidy your room. Tidy your room. Tidy your room.

Eat your breakfast. Eat your breakfast. Get ready for school. Get ready for school. Brush your teeth. Put on your shoes. Just constantly repeating yourself. And as you know, repeating yourself is exhausting.

Repeating yourself is absolutely exhausting. But you know, when we come to the Bible, repetition isn't to be seen as a problem. It's actually to be seen as a positive.

And repetition in the Bible isn't to exhaust us. It's actually there to excite us. Because when God says something once, we should listen. When God says something twice, we should stop and listen.

[2 : 11] But when God says something three or four or more times in the Bible, we need to listen up. So when God says something once, we should listen.

When he says something twice, we should listen up. But when God says something two, three, or four times, we should stop and absolutely listen. And you know, in many ways, that's the message of Psalm 118.

Right from the outset, the Lord is saying to all of us this morning, stop and listen. Stop and listen. We always come to church with loads of things in our mind, probably thinking about the week ahead.

But the Lord is saying from the outset of this Psalm, stop and listen. Because as we read, and as we read earlier, as we read through this Psalm, we see that the first half of Psalm 118, it's full of repetition.

It's full of repetition. And I'd like us to look this morning at the first half of the Psalm, the repetitive half of Psalm 118. And then this evening, we're going to look at the redemptive half of Psalm 118.

[3 : 18] So repetitive in the morning and redemptive in the evening. Repetitive in the morning, redemptive in the evening. And I'd encourage you to come for the second half of Psalm 118 this evening, especially if you're not in the habit of coming to church at night.

I've said this before, it's a good habit to get into. To be in church both ends on the Lord's Day.

Rather than staying away or sitting at home or watching online at home, make an effort to come to church at night.

I know it's not easy sometimes with children or other things, but if you want to grow as a Christian, or if you genuinely want to be a Christian, then come to church more often.

And so we're looking this morning at the first half of Psalm 118, which as we said, it's full of repetition. So it's the repetitive half. And I'd like us to look at this repetitive half under three headings, because there are three confessions in the first half of this Psalm.

Three confessions. There's a steadfast confession, there's a central confession, and then there's a singing confession. So there's a steadfast confession, a central confession, and a singing confession.

[4 : 31] So first of all, we see a steadfast confession. And you'll notice now all the repetition. A steadfast confession. Look at verse 1. Now, as we said, the first half of Psalm 118, it's full of repetition.

And that's clear to see as the opening and closing verses, they actually begin with repetition. So they're like bookends to this entire Psalm. There's this confession of the Lord's steadfast love enduring forever.

So Psalm 118, it begins and ends with repetition. This call to make this confession, where we're exhorted and encouraged. Verse 1 and verse 29, O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.

Then O give, verse 29, O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever. What's interesting is that Psalm 118, it's not the only Psalm to open with this call to confess about the Lord, that His steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 107, it begins with the same confession. O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.

[6 : 06] But you know, there's one Psalm, Psalm 136. Amazing Psalm. It's, you could say it's on a completely different level of repetition. Because it repeats this steadfast confession here in verse 1.

Psalm 136, it repeats it in all 26 verses. Of the Psalm. It repeats the same phrase again and again and again. His steadfast love endures forever.

His steadfast love endures forever. His steadfast love endures forever. So we have to ask the question, well, what does that actually mean? What does it mean, His steadfast love endures forever?

Why are we being exhorted and encouraged this morning to make this steadfast confession? What are we being called to confess in this Psalm? Well, we're being called to confess our thanksgiving to the Lord.

We're being called to acknowledge what the Lord has done for us. We're being called to appreciate what the Lord has done for us in our lives. Not only for providing salvation for lost sinners through the person of Jesus Christ, but also the fact that the Lord, He's provided all the blessings and all the benefits that we receive from Him.

[7 : 18] Everything we have today is from the hand of the Lord. And the Psalmist here, he's calling us to give thanks to the Lord for all the Fs of life.

Food, family, friends, and fitness. Even our finance. It's all from Him. It's all from Him. And it's all because, as the Psalmist says, He is good.

He's good. Not only good, He's gracious because He gives to us what we do not deserve. And He's also great. He's a great benefactor. And you know, it's no wonder the Psalmist, he's, this Psalm, Psalm 118, it's no wonder the Psalmist described as a Psalm of thanksgiving.

In fact, you could actually call it a hymn of thanksgiving. It's a hymn of thanksgiving. As you know, the book of Psalms, it's made up of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

The only reason it's called the book of Psalms is because there are more psalms in it than hymns or spiritual songs. And Psalm 118, it's a hymn. Because it's a hymn because we're to give praise and thanks.

[8 : 28] But it's also a hymn because it's part of this group of hymns called the Egyptian Hallel hymns. Psalms, which are Psalms numbered, Psalm 113 to Psalm 118.

And we know that these particular praise items in our Bible are hymns. Because when you go to the New Testament, Matthew and Mark, they both tell us that after the Lord's Supper had been instituted for the first time, Jesus and His disciples, they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

And the hymn that they sang was this psalm, Psalm 118. It's the last song that would have been sung during the Passover meal. And it's a hymn of thanksgiving.

It's encouraging and exhorting us to give thanks to the Lord for all the blessings and all the benefits that we receive from Him. Because He is good.

He is gracious. And He is great. But you know what's key to this hymn of thanksgiving is who we are to direct our thanksgiving towards.

[9 : 34] Because we're to give thanks, as the psalmist says, give thanks to the Lord. And unsurprisingly, when you read through this repetitive psalm or hymn, the title Lord is repeated throughout this hymn.

In fact, out of 29 verses which we read earlier, the title Lord, if you notice it, the capital letters of the title Lord, is repeated 24 times in 29 verses.

Which should show us and even stress to us that the Lord is the focus. The Lord is the focus of this hymn, which means that we, as those who have been created by the Lord, we are to attribute and ascribe our thanksgiving to nothing and to no one else apart from the Lord.

We're to give our thanksgiving to the Lord. Because as the title Lord suggests, He's the King. He's the Covenant King. He's the King of Kings.

He's the Lord of Lords. He's the one, as the title Lord means, He's the one who keeps covenant. He makes promises to us and He keeps all His promises to us.

[10 : 40] He's the one who's trustworthy and true. He's sure and steadfast. He's the Lord who is loyal and loving towards us. He's faithful and He promises that He'll never forsake us.

He's the Lord, the Covenant King, the one who keeps covenant. And the psalmist is saying, the hymn writer is saying, give thanks to the Lord for He's good. His steadfast love endures forever. We are to make this steadfast confession. We're being exhorted and encouraged this morning to make this steadfast confession to the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever. I love that phrase there, steadfast love.

It's a lovely phrase, isn't it? It actually expresses and you could say explains one of the most important Hebrew words in the Bible. We've mentioned it many times before.

[11 : 39] It's the word chesed. Chesed, great word to know if you ever want to impress your friends about your Hebrew. The word chesed. For centuries, translators, they struggled to simplify this word, to simplify the sentiment of the word chesed, because there are no English words that really capture or convey the Lord's undeserved, unbreakable, unrestricted, unconditional, unchanging covenant love towards sinners.

How do you describe God's love? That's what they always struggle with. How do you put God's love towards lost sinners into words? And you know, it was the Old Testament scholar, Dale Ralph Davis.

I love listening to him. He's very interesting to listen to. But he said that the word chesed expresses love that's surprising. It's love that's sustaining.

It's love that never lets go. Then he says, it's love that has super glue on it. We all know what happens when you super glue your fingers together.

And Dale Ralph Davis is saying, the Lord's love has super glue on it. It's the kind of love that will never let you go. And the psalmist here, or the hymn writer, he's exhorting and encouraging us this morning to give thanks to the Lord.

[13 : 06] Why did you come to church this morning? Did you come to church to give thanks to the Lord because he is good? That's what the psalmist is saying. Give thanks to the Lord because he is good.

He's gracious. He's great. And it's all because of his chesed love, his steadfast love. It endures forever. And it has been displayed and demonstrated to us on the cruel cross at Calvary.

If ever you want to know how much the Lord loves you, you look to the cross. That's what Paul tells us in the New Testament.

God has demonstrated his love towards us in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Therefore, despite many of our failings and many of our failures, despite all the doubts that we have and the distresses that we go through in life and the struggles that we have, we've been exhorted and encouraged this morning.

To delight in the Lord because his steadfast love endures forever. And notice who is being exhorted. Who is being encouraged?

[14 : 14] Who is being exhorted and encouraged to delight in the Lord? He says, verse one, O give thanks to the Lord for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever. Verse two, Let Israel say his steadfast love endures forever.

So Israel, of course, was God's saved people. Those God's saved people were those who looked and listened and leaned upon and love the Lord.

They're God's saved people. So my Christian friend this morning, you're to give a steadfast confession to the Lord saying, his steadfast love endures forever. But not only God's saved people, we're also told that God's serving people are to give a steadfast confession too.

He says, verse three, Let the house of Aaron say his steadfast love endures forever. And so the house of Aaron, they're the priests and they're the servants of the Lord.

They're those who serve the Lord at the Lord's house. They're those who minister God's word to God's people. They're the elders and the deacons and the presenters and the Sunday school teachers and the creche leaders and the tea servers and the church officers.

[15 : 24] They're God's serving people. And there also says the hymn writer here, they're to give their steadfast confession to the Lord that his steadfast love endures forever.

But the hymn writer, he doesn't stop there. No, no. He says it's not only God's saved people and God's serving people who are to give this steadfast confession.

God's seeking people are also being called called to give a steadfast confession. And God's seeking people, you could say, well, they're not yet God's saved people.

They're not yet God's serving people, but they're God's seeking people because, as he says there, verse four, they fear the Lord. They worship the Lord. They come to the Lord's house on the Lord's day.

And although they may not confess it openly yet, they're seeking the Lord. So you, my friend, seeking the Lord this morning, you're being described here in this psalm.

[16 : 28] And you too are to give a steadfast confession about the Lord. You too are to confess that his steadfast love endures forever. And you know, the amazing thing about the introduction to this hymn is that it's all encompassing.

No one is excluded. Everyone is included here. And he's exhorting us, he's encouraging us, and he says, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let Israel say, let God's saved people say, his steadfast love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron say, God's serving people, let them say, his steadfast love endures forever.

And let those who fear the Lord, those who are seeking the Lord this morning, let them say too, his steadfast love endures forever.

It's a steadfast confession about the Lord's love towards lost sinners, such as we are. But then we see, secondly, a central confession. So a steadfast confession, then a central confession.

[17 : 33] Look at verse 5. And there's more repetition. 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. As you can see, there's more repetition in these verses. But the first thing that should stand out is that in these five verses, the title, Lord, is repeated six times.

Again, emphasizing that we are to attribute and ascribe our thanksgiving to nothing and no one else apart from the Lord.

And why? Because as the hymn writer says here, salvation is of the Lord. That's what he's confessing here. He says, Out of my distress, verse 5, I called on the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free.

[18 : 39] You know, the hymn writer, he's confessing his praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for saving him and for setting him free. Because as he describes there, when he was in the depths of despair, when he was distressed in his soul about his sin, he came before the Lord and he cried to the Lord and he called upon the name of the Lord and as he says there, the Lord heard me and the Lord answered me.

And that's what it is for whenever anyone comes to the Lord seeking him, whenever you come to the Lord in the depths of despair and distressed because of your sin, you can come to the Lord and cry to the Lord and call upon the name of the Lord and be assured as the psalmist was here that the Lord hears and the Lord will answer.

And he says here, The Lord saved me and set me free. The Lord saved me and set me free. Now I'm sure that we're all familiar with John Newton's 18th century hymn, Amazing Grace.

I'm sure we've all heard of it where John Newton, he confesses about the transforming power of the gospel which changed him. He was a slave trader from, he was bringing people from the coast of

Africa to the sugar cane fields of the Caribbean and he was transformed from being a slave trader to a gospel preacher.

And as he describes himself in the hymn, he says, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.

[20 : 21] What I noted recently is that over the past few years and probably because we live in such a politically correct society, some people have sought to alter and even adjust the opening lyrics of Newton's famous hymn because they didn't like being referred to as a wretch.

So they changed it from Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me to read Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved and set me free. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved and set me free.

Which isn't necessarily wrong or unbiblical. But why change it after so long, after about 200 years? And yet what we see in Psalm 118 is that if this hymn writer had written Newton's hymn from his own experience, he would probably have used the altered and adjusted version.

He would have said, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved and set me free. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see. That's what he's saying here in verses 5 to 7.

This is Amazing Grace that saved and set me free. And it's with that confession that the hymn writer, he emphasizes that the Lord is on his side. The Lord is on his side.

[21 : 41] That's what he repeats. Verse 6, 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.

And you know, I love that confession. The Lord is on my side. When everybody else leaves me, the Lord is on my side. The Lord is on my side.

It reminds me of another psalm, Psalm 124. Psalm 124, it was the anthem of the Reformation in the 16th century.

Reformation which began on the 31st of October, 1517, which, by the way, wasn't Halloween being celebrated by Christians, but it was Reformation Day. Because the Reformation sought to preach and proclaim to the whole of Europe and even beyond that salvation is not based upon our baptism or the church or the Pope, but upon Scripture alone.

And it's not accomplished or achieved by works, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And it's all to the glory of God alone. But, you know, despite all the obstacles and the opposition that all the Reformers faced in the 16th century, Psalm 124, it became the anthem of the Reformation.

[23 : 03] They kept going back to it because the Reformers knew, as it says in Psalm 124, if the Lord had not been on our side, when evil men rose up against us, then we would have been swallowed up and swept away in the flood.

And that's the confession of the hymn writer here. If it had not been the Lord who was on my side, I would be lost. If it had not been the Lord who was on my side, I would be wandering aimlessly in this world.

If it had not been the Lord who was on my side, I would never have come to salvation to know of the wonder of God's grace and God's love towards me. And so the psalmist here or the hymn writer is confessing, the Lord is on my side.

And because the Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me, he says. The Lord is on my side as my helper. I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

My friend, is the Lord on your side this morning? Do you know the Lord on your side this morning? What a great confession.

[24 : 11] The Lord is on my side. But this leads us to the central confession in verses 8 and 9. But in this confession, it's not really central to salvation.

It's actually central to the entire Bible. With Psalm 118, it's central because, well, Psalm 118 is a fascinating thing.

It's found between the shortest and the longest psalm in the Bible. So as you know, if you look at the previous psalm, you'll see that Psalm 117, it's the shortest psalm in the Bible.

Shortest chapter in the Bible. Only two verses. And then Psalm 119, if you've ever read through it, it has 172 verses. It's the longest psalm in the Bible. But more than that, Psalm 118, it's central to the Bible because it's literally the center of the Bible.

It's the center of the Bible. There are 594 chapters before Psalm 118. And there are 594 chapters after Psalm 118.

[25 : 17] And what's interesting is that when you add those chapter numbers together, so when you add 594, with 594, you get 1188. 1188.

1188. If you break it down, it's 118.8. Psalm 118, verse 8, is said to be the center, center verse in the entire Bible.

Psalm 118, verse 8, what does it say? 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 man.

And you know, what better verse to remind us than the center verse of the entire Bible? What better verse to remind us that it's far better for us to find refuge in the Lord than to refuse the Lord?

It's far better for us to find refuge in the Lord than to trust in mere men and mere mortals. It's far better for us to find refuge in the Lord, this Lord who's repeated throughout the entire Psalm, who makes promises and keeps His promises.

[26 : 28] Far better for us to find refuge in Him, this One who is sure and steadfast, who promises never to leave us and never to forsake us. Far better for us to find refuge in Him than to trust in someone else.

And you know, this is such a central confession that the hymn writer, he repeats the point. So he said, repetition, it's positive. He repeats the point. Just so you make sure that you are doing this in your life, he says, verses 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. It's better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in anything or anyone else.

that's why it's the center verse to the entire Bible. And so if you take anything away with you this morning, if you take anything from Psalm 118, take the center verse of your Bible.

Take the center verse of your Bible home with you because it's a central confession. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

[27 : 42] And so the first half of Psalm 118, it's full of repetition in which there's a steadfast confession verses 1 to 4, there's a central confession verses 5 to 9, and then lastly we see a singing confession.

A singing confession. Look at verse 10. All nations surrounded me in the name of the Lord, I cut them off. 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 fire among thorns. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off.

So in these verses, as you see, there's yet more repetition. But the repetition is not a problem, it's positive. Because the hymn writer is confessing four times in three verses that the nations, they surrounded me, they surrounded me, they surrounded me on every side.

But in those three verses, the hymn writer, he also repeats three times that in the name of the Lord, I cut them off. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off.

[28 : 47] And the reason he talks about the name of the Lord, the covenant king, is because the name of the Lord is strong. The name of the Lord is secure.

The name of the Lord is one that saves. And our Bible tells us, our Bible teaches us that there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved, except the name of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's how the psalmist, the hymn writer, could say, in the name of the Lord, I cut them off. The name of the Lord is strong, it's secure, and it saves.

But it's verse 14 that gives to us this singing confession. And what's remarkable about this singing confession is that it's not only a personal confession, it's also a repeated confession. But as you can see, it's not repeated in this hymn of thanksgiving. It's actually repeated throughout the history of the Old Testament. This isn't the first time that verse 14 has appeared in the Bible. Because this singing confession, it was first sung way back in the time of Moses.

So Moses, immediately after the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites, you know, they've been in slavery and bondage in Egypt for 400 years. But when the Lord rescued and redeemed his people, Moses sang on the banks of the Red Sea in Exodus 15. And he sang this confession, the Lord is my strength and my song.

He has become my salvation. But that's not the only time this verse is repeated. What's amazing is that years later, Isaiah also repeats this singing confession. He repeats it in his song of salvation in Isaiah chapter 12. And in that song of salvation, Isaiah is looking forward to the moment when the Lord's people will once again be rescued and redeemed. Not from Egypt, but from exile. And in his song of salvation, Isaiah writes, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.

[31 : 07] And what Psalm 118 is actually calling us to confess then, we're being called to confess what others have confessed before us. It's not something that's new. It's not a new truth. It's an old truth.

It's a timeless truth. Something that has been confessed down throughout the generations. And the hymn writer here, he's calling us to confess what those before us have confessed.

In many ways, he's calling us to confess what the generation before us confessed. He's calling us to commit our lives to the Lord and make this personal confession. The Lord is my strength.

He is my song. He is my song. And he has become my salvation. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. And you know, my friend, I'm sure you know of Christians who lived before you in the previous generation and a previous generation to that. And you've heard of Christians down throughout the centuries. And they've all made this confession, this personal confession. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. And so what the hymn writer is telling all of us to do this morning, whether we are God's saved people, God's serving people, or God's seeking people, whoever we are this morning, we are all being called to make this personal confession. The Lord is my strength.

He is my song. And he has become my salvation. My salvation. But you know, as we conclude this morning, what we ought to see about the repetitive half of Psalm 118, and I hope you've seen the repetition. The amazing thing about the repetitive half of Psalm 118 is that it's preparing us for the redemptive half of Psalm 118, which we'll see this evening.

[33 : 06] If you come for part two, because part two, all of it is pointing us to the Lord, to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's pointing us to the Redeemer, to Jesus himself. And so repetition, although it may be a problem with children, it's still positive. Positive because repetition in Psalm 118, it's reminding us. It's reminding us. It's reassuring us. It's calling all of us to make this personal confession of faith. The Lord is my strength. He is my song. And he has become my salvation.

I hope that is your confession today. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks for this wonderful Psalm, a Psalm that reminds us and reassures us that the steadfast love of the Lord, it endures forever, that although we might feel that we are not loved, although we might think that we are unlovable, the Lord assures us today that we are loved with an everlasting love, and that it is better for us to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man or women or boys or girls, to solely trust in the Lord who has displayed and demonstrated his love. And so, Lord, help us to come this morning and to confess like the psalmist and say that the Lord is my strength. He is my song.

He has become my salvation. Lord, bless thy truth to us, we ask. Bless our fellowship, Lord, afterwards the tea and the coffee prepared for us. Help us always to eat and drink to thy glory.

And Lord, help us to be thankful, to give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Do us good, then we pray. Go before us, we ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. We're going to sing a few more verses in Psalm 118. We're going to pick up where we left off. So, page 398 in the Blue Psalm book, Psalm 118, Psalm 118.

[35 : 56] to God's Prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Better it is to trust in God, not trust in God's defence.

Better it is to trust in God's land, but to trust in God's land, make princes our God's confidence. The nations join in all in one.

Dead come as we are part, but in the Lord's most holy name, I shall have all heard.

They compass me apart. They compass me apart.

cast me apart but in the Lord's most holy name I shall have all retired Like bees they come as me apart Like a two thorns that live Make which I die for them Shall I destroy in God's own name

[38 : 34] Thou soon hast asked that I might fall But my Lord helped me God my salvation is become My strength has so many seen The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and forevermore Amen