

## Psalm 118 – John Karmelich

1. I want to open this lesson with a question: If one desires to live a life of pleasing God, how exactly do we do that? As I like to say, the greatest purpose of living is to use our lives to make a difference for God. My question is, how do we know if we are pleasing to Him? That question leads me directly to my lesson title: It is the single word "victory". Let me explain:
  - a) There are millions of things one can do with one's life to make a difference for God. Some are simple, and some are life long tasks. But I suspect what all of us want is to know is whether or not we have made a difference for Him. We want our lives to count for something. We never know how long we have to live. The key to life is not how long we get to live, but how much of a difference have we made in that given time span.
2. To explain how we are to please God, let me explain in context of the psalms we are studying.
  - a) In this lesson we finish a group of psalms known as the "Egyptian Haifa" that started back in Psalm 113. In the bible, sometimes Egypt is a symbol of the world. Remember that the nation of Israel was in effect born in Egypt. The idea of "The Egyptian Haifa" for us is that like the Israelites, God called us out of this world to make a difference for Him.
  - b) This group of psalms called the Egyptian Haifa runs from Psalm 113 to 118.
    - i) If you recall from two lessons ago, Psalm 113 is about being "called" by God.
    - ii) That led us in the last lesson to Psalm 114. That one is about the realization that God is preparing the way to lead us down the path He desires for our lives.
    - iii) That led us (again last lesson) to Psalm 115, which discusses other "gods" that need to be rejected in order to follow the true God.
    - iv) That led to Psalm 116, which talks about how we are blessed for following Him.
    - v) That led to Psalm 117, which I see being about encouraging others to follow Him.
  - c) All of that leads us to this lesson and Psalm 118, the final one of this group. This psalm focuses on victory in the life of the believer. That idea of victory leads me back to my lesson title. That question is how do we have the victory of knowing that our lives have made a difference for God? The answer is our continuous and regular effort to make a difference for Him does lead us to a victorious life.
3. Before I explain that, let me also talk about why this whole group of Psalms is here in this book.
  - a) We are now in the fifth book of the psalms. Without giving my usual lecture how this fifth book ties to the book of Deuteronomy, the point of this fifth book of the psalms is about leading the type of life that God desires for us.
  - b) That leads me back to discussing the series of psalms called the "Egyptian Haifa". What these psalms do is remind us of how to get our focus on Him so we can serve Him.
  - c) So if these psalms are so important, why are they way back here near the back of the book? The answer is that first we have to learn about God before we can focus on the idea of wanting to serve Him with our lives. These psalms are "way back here" simply because first we have to learn about the desire to worship God and serve Him, and once we do that we can now focus on the "how" and "why" questions of serving Him.
4. OK it's time to discuss Psalm 118 itself. If this psalm were just about saying that we trust in God in order to be victorious in life to make a difference for Him, it would only be one line long.
  - a) This psalm has 29 verses. It gives examples of struggles we can have in life. It is a reminder of how we depend upon God in order to be victorious in the first place.
  - b) This psalm is also far more than saying Jesus will come back one day and we will have a big party for making a difference for Him. It is about appreciating the life we have as believers when we are busy making that difference for Him.
  - c) Think of it this way: Nobody wants his or her life to be a waste of time. This psalm gets us to think about ways we can live in order to make that difference for Him.

5. Let me also end this introduction by discussing when this psalm was possibly written.
  - a) I've read commentators who think this psalm is as old as when Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Others argue it was written many hundreds of years later when the first Jewish temple was first dedicated under Solomon. Others argue even much later when the Israelites returned to Promised Land after the Babylonian captivity.
    - i) The fact that different scholars argue for different historical dates means that no one knows for sure. The one thing all of these different dates have in common is that they are all times of celebration for what God has done for Jewish nation.
  - b) This leads back to us. God wants us to live joyful lives. One way to experience joy is to consider how He is bringing victory into our lives. Whatever it is God has called us to do to make a difference for Him, that is a victory. We don't have to cross a finish line to celebrate that victory of making a difference for God. We just should pause every now and then, realize that God is working through us, then focus on the joy of knowing that we have been called by Him and are making a difference for Him. In summary, making that difference for God is the greatest purpose one can have in life.
  - c) While you are thinking about what to do, hopefully that gets us to focus on one's commitment to God and gets us in a good mood as we start this psalm of victory.
6. Psalm 118. Verse 1: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
  - a) Notice the focus of Verse 1 is on God, and not on us. We shouldn't pat ourselves on the back (if that were physically possible) for the good things we have done for God. What we should do is give the credit for whatever we are doing for His sake back to Him.
  - b) Let me try this another way: If you can't think of any good reason to be grateful to God at the moment, then try this psalm line, "He is good; His love endures forever."
    - i) We may be in a tough situation and ponder how God could possibly be good if He is allowing a bad thing to happen. Thinking about God and how He is good will see us through our tough situations and helps us to deal with them better.
    - ii) One of the keys to living joyfully for God is to know that not every moment in life is the finish line. A great biblical line to remember is "it came to pass". That is a King James Version line that effectively means, "This event too came to an end."
      - a) According to my bible software program, that phrase is used 452 times in the King James Bible Version. If those 452 references came to ends, then we can rest assure that whatever we are dealing with "will come to pass".
  - c) Next, I need to discuss the phrase, "His love endures forever". When I say, need, I mean that the next three verses repeat that phrase. It is also repeated in the final line of this psalm (Verse 29). So what does it mean when it says, "His love endures forever"?
    - i) First, let's apply it to our own lives. When we are dealing with a tough situation, remember the "it came to pass" reference. Whatever we are dealing with will not last forever, but His love for us will last forever. My point is that God will see us through that tough situation and His love endures through it and past it.
    - ii) Let's try it another way: God wants us to show gratitude for what He is doing in our lives. It is more than gratitude for salvation. It is about gratitude that He is guiding our lives in a way that makes a difference for Him. I see the purpose of the "Egyptian Haifa" Psalms (#113-#118) as about showing gratitude to God for leading down a path in life that makes that difference for Him.
    - iii) This leads me back to my lesson title of "victory". The idea of the Christian victorious life does not mean that every moment will go well and no problems ever occur. It does mean that we have the greatest source one could ever imagine guiding us through our lives and He desires to lead us through life "His way".
    - iv) What if I have no idea what God wants me to do next? We are all in that boat. ☺ Saying "His love endures forever" to Him is about trusting that He is guiding our lives and then we make the best decisions possible trusting in His guidance.

7. Verse 2: Let Israel say: "His love endures forever." <sup>3</sup> Let the house of Aaron say: "His love endures forever." <sup>4</sup> Let those who fear the LORD say: "His love endures forever."
- a) As these three verses indicate, we are not done with "His love endures forever".
  - b) It is important to state that God not only wants to bless our lives by trusting in Him, but also to bless us "corporately" (i.e., group form). Let me explain further:
    - i) Notice Verse 2 asks all of Israel to bless God. In the literal sense, it refers to all the Jewish people. For us Christians, it refers to all who are called to be believers.
    - ii) One can loosely translate Verse 2 as, "May all of those called by God to live a life for Him state individually and as a group how "His love endures forever".
  - c) OK, why state out loud or even privately that His love endures forever? It is to remind ourselves that He is still there guiding us even though we can't sense it or if things are not going well for the moment. By reminding ourselves that God is there and He is good to us, we are giving Him the credit for the good things of our lives. The idea of stating that line of praise reminds us of who really gets the credit.
    - i) OK John, so how do I know God gets the credit? How do I know it was not my hard work or good fortune that got me through my mess? Good question.
      - a) The best answer I could give is to try ignoring God for a while and watch the consequences occur. I have found that He loves us too much to leave us alone. Those who are called by God learn that whether we like or not, we are "stuck with Him". He wants to bless us when we trust in Him.
      - b) It is when we realize that He desires to guide our lives and He is blessing us when we trust in Him that we do say, "His love endures forever."
  - d) Verse 3 then says "Let the house of Aaron say, His love endures forever".
    - i) OK, who is the house of Aaron and why should I care? Aaron was the brother of Moses. Aaron was chosen by God to be the first Israelite high priest. (See Exodus 29:44 as an example of that fact.) Aaron's descendants were all chosen by God to be the future high priests and the rest of his descendants support the high priest.
    - ii) OK John, so what? From God's perspective, we as believers were also chosen by God to worship Him and serve Him. We as people may not have known we were called by God until a specific date in history. From God's all-knowing perspective, He chose us before we were ever born. (See Ephesians 1:4 on this point.)
    - iii) My point is Christian believers are called to be priests as well. That simply means we are called to make a difference for God in this lifetime. It means we live to help others draw closer to Him and share His love with others.
    - iv) Therefore when the text says, "The House of Aaron is to state God's love", think of it as believers who are making a difference for God in this lifetime.
  - e) Verse 4 then asks that "those who fear the LORD" say "His love endures forever".
    - i) Ok, if "Israel" represents all believers, and if the "House of Aaron" represents those of us who respond to God's call in our lives, who are "those who fear the LORD"?
    - ii) The progression here is that then Christians are to share God's love with others. Hopefully others respond to that love with their own lives and join in that praise.
    - iii) Think of it as "spreading the Gospel message" to make a difference in this world.
      - a) As I like to say, I'm not impressed with people who say they believe in Jesus. I'm impressed with somebody who does something about it.
      - b) If we are making a difference for God in this world, there should be evidence of that "spreading" to other people. It doesn't mean we all have to be converting new believers. Some of us work with existing believers to strengthen their faith and that is the purpose of this verse as well.
  - f) In summary it comes back to the idea of victory. If we are living to make a difference for God in this world, in one way or another we will have victory in that our lives do make a difference if we use them for His glory. That is the idea behind these three verses.

8. Verse 5: In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.
  - a) Let's assume all of us reading this already trust in God. Most people who read and study the psalms usually have some interest in learning about God or they wouldn't be here.
  - b) Whatever is happening in Verse 5, it is not good. Somehow the psalmist was suffering for some reason at the moment. The psalmist cried out to God and "He set me free".
  - c) Let's personalize this. Suppose we are going through a particularly bad situation: Will crying out to God end that bad situation at that moment? Usually not.
    - i) I find that God does not usually want to magically end a bad situation, but He usually wants to guide us through that situation.
    - ii) The point is the psalmist realized that the result of whatever he was dealing with is now God's problem and not his problem. (Assuming the writer is a "he" here.)
    - iii) Imagine being in horrible pain. Imagine losing a loved one. Imagine the worst thing one can at the moment. The point is "God sets us free" by leading us through that situation and reminding us that He has freed us from the worry about whatever that problem is. Yes we still have to deal with it, but not with the worry of what is going to happen. That is how God sets us free.
    - iv) Feel better now? Good. We have "victory" here. We can move on to Verse 6. ☺
9. Verse 6: The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
  - a) I was trying to think of the worst thing someone can do to me. People can cause pain to our lives that harm us in horrible ways. There are things worse than death.
    - i) In some ways a quick or even a tortuous death is less painful than a lifetime of living with the pain done to us by others or even caused our own actions.
    - ii) That horrible thought, leads us to this verse. Think of that horrible thought and then add Verse 6 to that that thought.
  - b) One reason I refuse to go through life without God is I can't imagine having to deal with the horrible aspects of this world without the belief in a fair God that judges all things.
    - i) One reason we cry out that "God's love endures forever" is that He does provide us with comfort through the best and worst of times.
    - ii) It is our trust in Him that helps us through such times.
  - c) OK, now suppose things are not horrible at the moment and it is just an "average day". ☺
    - i) The point is we can and should trust in God to guide us through our lives no matter what is going to happen that day. We have no reason to ever be afraid if we know that the results of our lives are His problem and not ours.
    - ii) Believing in God is more than believing He exists or that He has paid for our sins. It is to believe we belong to Him and our lives are now completely His business.
      - a) That is why we shouldn't fear what people can do to us. Yes those fears are real and I know of some pretty horrible stories of pain and abuse. The point is the love of God is greater (think comfort) than any and all pain that people can and do inflict on others.
      - b) OK, on that depressing note, I'll sneak over to Verse 7.
10. Verse 7: The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.
  - a) Does this verse mean we will win every battle we face in life? Of course not.
  - b) The point of this verse is not that we instantly win all struggles we face in life. It does mean, eventually those who trust in God do defeat the sources of evil.
  - c) I was once taught, "Why focus on evil if we know that God will triumph over evil in the long run?" Think of those who have tortured and killed others just for the sake of evil men growing in their power. Eventually evil people die and suffer God's judgment.
    - i) To quote an old expression, "All that it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." If we make that effort to battle what is evil, evil always loses. That is an underlying point of this verse. If we are trusting in God, we as a society will always eventually win over whoever opposes His will.

11. Verse 8: It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. <sup>9</sup> It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.
  - a) Let me paraphrase these verses: It is better to trust in God than trust in people or to trust in say, the government to solve my problems for me.
    - i) Does this mean I can't ask someone to help me with my problems? Of course not. It just mean we look to God to lead us through our situation and then we make the best decisions possible. If that involves the help of others, so be it.
    - ii) We give the credit to God for leading us down the path He desires. Does that mean I shouldn't thank people? Again, of course not. We realize it was and is God leading our lives even if others are helping us with our situation at hand.
  - b) It might help to explain these two verses another way: The point is we should not make an "idol" out of any person or group of people. Our Savior is God and not people.
    - i) When I say "idol", I mean that we should not look to any person as the only way to solve our problems, but that God alone is working behind the scenes of our lives.
    - ii) If that person or group helping us doesn't come through, then it was God's will for them to not come through. People will let us down at times, but God is always working for our good whether we see it happening or not.
  - c) Remember again that I see this psalm as one of victory. If we look to God and not people to lead us down the path He desires for our lives, then we will have victory in life. It may not happen the way we expect, but He will lead us the way He desires for our lives.
12. Verse 10: All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. <sup>11</sup> They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. <sup>12</sup> They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off. <sup>13</sup> I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me.
  - a) In these four verses, they are describing ways of being in trouble
    - i) In Verse 10, it describes the nation of Israel being surrounded by enemies.
      - a) Groups that hate Israel's existence surround modern Israel as well. Yet God still allows that country to survive another day. Despite whatever happens to that nation, the point is good will always triumph over evil.
    - ii) To personalize it, consider being in a situation where you feel like wherever you turn you have to face enemies. Even if we don't believe we are such a situation, remember that evil forces always exist all around us whose goal it is, is to make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus in this world. That is why the bad news of being surrounded by enemies is followed by the good news of "LORD has cut them off."
    - iii) The point is we don't have to fear such enemies, because in effect we have already won as God is in control and He always allows those who trust in Him to win in the long run over such evil forces, be they human or demonic in nature.
  - b) Notice the repeated phrase "I cut them off". It doesn't say God cut them off, but "I" did.
    - i) One of the great joys of being a Christian is to realize that God desires to work through us to make a difference for Him in this world. To put it another way, God provides us with the strength and "spiritual weapons" to face whatever it is we have to face in life. Then, by drawing upon His strength, we can and do have victory over whatever type of evil we do have to face in this world.
  - c) Verse 12 repeats the same concept, but changes the illustration from "enemies all around" to that of our enemies being like bees buzzing around us. The idea is no matter how bad the situation, we can have victory in life (there's that title again) not by defeating such forces by our own power, but by trusting in God to work through us for His victory.
  - d) Verse 13 says, "I was pushed back and was about to fall, but God helped me." The idea of victory does not mean we don't lose battles on the way to winning our war. God often allows horrible things to happen in order to prepare us for future battles. The point is in the end, we do win, because our trust is in His might, not our own might to win.

13. Verse 14: The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.
  - a) To paraphrase this verse, I realize that God has guided me to victory so far in my life and therefore, I show gratitude to Him. That is "my strength and my song".
  - b) Let me explain the phrase "my salvation" here. Wouldn't the psalmist believe he was already saved prior to Verse 14? I would argue yes. Would you say that you and I are saved by our trust in Jesus' payment of our sins prior to God ever rescuing us out any bad situation in life? Of course.
    - i) Therefore, what does the psalmist mean by, "He (God) has become my salvation"?
      - a) It could refer to the fact that the psalmist lived through his "bad time".
      - b) It could refer to the fact that the psalmist trusts God more now.
      - c) It could refer to whatever victory the psalmist had when writing this.
      - d) The point is the psalmist realized that God's guidance got him through his life to date so the psalmist could live to praise God another day.
  - c) Let me come back to my favorite definition of salvation, courtesy of Jon MacArthur:
    - i) Salvation is what we did receive when we first trusted in God.
    - ii) Salvation is what we will receive when we get to go to heaven.
    - iii) Salvation is what we continue to receive, as we trust God daily.
      - a) I believe it is this continuous present idea the psalmist had in mind here.
  - d) The point of this verse is that when we realize that God has guided us so far in life and when we take the time to praise Him for the good things of our life, that act of worship does help with our "continuous" salvation: That is the concept of trusting God daily.
14. Verse 15: Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! <sup>16</sup> The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"
  - a) Speaking of celebrating victory, I present these two verses. They describe a time of jubilation in realizing how God has lead them and us to victory.
  - b) It would be best if we try to personalize this as opposed to trying to find some historical aspect to a specific Israelite victory: Coming back to the issue of salvation, all of us who are believers have at the least received one victory in that we are chosen by God to be with Him forever. How do we know if we are chosen? Simple. Believe that Jesus is God and that He has died for our sins, then one can know for sure we are chosen.
    - i) The reason Jesus used the phrase "born again" to describe salvation, is because being "born" is the beginning of a lifetime of trusting God. (See John 3:3 and 3:7.)
    - ii) My point is that being saved is just the beginning of the Christian life. We then can enjoy a wonderful life of receiving victories "all the time" because we realize that God is working in our lives to make that difference for Him.
    - iii) It comes back to the concept of "continuous salvation". The idea that God is always working in our lives to lead us to His victories.
  - c) Let me try this concept one more way: Let's say we feel like we have not accomplished much in life and we don't feel so victorious. The easy thing to do is to compare our lives to someone else and think, "Look how God has blessed that person far more than me." What we have to remember is that God does not call all people down the same path in life. What God has planned for me is different than for you or anyone else.
  - d) The question we need to ask is, "Are we doing what God desires of our lives here at the moment?" If I don't know what to do next, ask Him. Ask God how we can make a difference for Him today. It is amazing how He responds to requests of the desire to be used by Him in our lives. I find that God puts desires in our hearts to use our lives to make that difference for Him. Even if such answers are not obvious, the point is God does desire to guide us for His and our victories.
    - i) That is the point of the "shouts of joy" in Verse 15. It is the realization that by trusting in God we can have a victorious life by trusting in Him.

- e) This leads me to a discussion of the phrase, "His right hand". That phrase is used three times in two verses.
    - i) To explain that phrase, I don't believe God literally has a right hand. I've never liked the image of God being an old man sitting in a chair. The God I worship is infinitely more powerful than a "human-like entity" controlling things.
    - ii) This leads me back to "His right hand". With all apologies to left handed people, the majority of people are right handed. Therefore, one's right hand represents one's "strong hand". Think of "His right hand" as representing God's strength.
    - iii) This leads me back to these verses. They say God's right hand has done "mighty things" and His right hand is "lifted high".
      - a) The text says "mighty things" twice. Why? It is a style of poetry used for emphasis. Remember in the original text there was no "bold font" or text wasn't put in italics. Saying something twice is a way of emphasis.
      - b) So what are these mighty things the writer is talking about? To answer that, we have to look at this in context of the whole psalm. The main point of this psalm (as I see it) is that God leads us to victory in life. Therefore, these poetic ways of describing His strength is a way of emphasizing the fact that it is God, not us, leading us to a victorious life.
  - f) This might be a good time and place to explain what I mean by "victorious".
    - i) It doesn't mean we win every battle we face in life. It doesn't mean we defeat every enemy and issue our way on our timing. It doesn't mean we win every contest in sports. It means we trust in God and He leads us down the right path.
    - ii) Being a football fan, I remember a great analogy here. A long time ago, there was a game between USC and UCLA when both schools were having a great year. A lineman after the game told the opposing player who he was battling the whole game, "I am not a winner because we won the game. I am a winner because of my trust in Jesus for salvation." I think that summarizes being victorious very well.
    - iii) OK John supposed I don't play sports or I am not a soldier. How do I relate to being victorious? The point if we are living our lives to make a difference for God, we will be declared victorious when we get to heaven not based on what we do, but based on what God has done through us. That is our goal as believers.
    - iv) To put it another way, if we trust in Jesus, no matter what, we cannot lose. We are not relying on our strength, but God's strength to work through us.
15. Verse 17: I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.
- a) The point of this verse is that trusting in God does mean eternal life. The victory I have been describing means that we will live forever.
  - b) I also believe that if we are willing to live our lives to make a difference for Jesus, we too will get opportunities to proclaim what God has done in our lives.
  - c) Jesus told His disciples that they would get the opportunity to be a witness for Him and brought before kings and governors because they knew Jesus. (See Mark 13:9 or Matthew 10:18 on that point.) I believe that principle applies to us Christians as well.
    - i) This does not mean all believers will get to be actual speakers for Jesus in front of famous people. However, I am convinced that if we are willing to live to make that difference for Jesus, our words will spread so that even the "famous" will hear about Jesus. Think over the last two millennia how true that has been. Think how the death of Jesus in an obscure part of the world has spread. The Gospel message continues to be spread to famous and infamous alike around the world.
  - d) So John is this verse saying that Jesus Himself will proclaim what God the Father has done or is it saying you and I will proclaim this? The answer is both. It is speaking about the fact the word of God continues to be spread through the millennia and that God uses anyone and everyone willing to take a stand for Him to make a difference for Him.

16. Verse 18: The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.
- a) OK, how has God chastened us severely? The point is not that God is going to physically beat us one day. The point is that if we have committed our lives to serving God, He disciplines us in order to live more in conformity of His will.
  - b) If you are a new believer reading this, just understand that it is God's desire to guide our lives to live the way He wants us to live. That's the "sever chastening" being described.
  - c) But John, what about all of the millions who have been martyred for the Gospel message? Haven't such people been given over to death? Well yes and no.
    - i) That is why I believe this verse is talking about eternal life.
    - ii) I stated this psalm is about victory, and I mean it, even for the martyrs. If God knows all things and He knows how long we will live, then the point is He is working on our lives (no matter what the length) to discipline us in order to live the way He wants us to live.
  - d) I remember hearing that the continuous process of salvation being described as God taking up residence inside of us. Then for the rest of our lives God desires to take control over every aspect of our lives. That is the "chastening" being described here.
    - i) It is also chastening, because God is battling our free will. God teaches the believer throughout our lives, "OK, you want to do it your way, just watch the consequences of your decisions play out." That is also how He chastens us.
  - e) Let me end this discussion by saying in effect, no one likes being chastened by God, but it is a necessary process for us to grow in our trust of Him. The idea that we are still alive after such chastening is a proof that God is allowing such things in order to teach us to trust Him through different situations of our life. OK enough on that, time to move on.
17. Verse 19: Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
- <sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.
- a) The "gates of righteousness" literally refers to the entrance to heaven. Personally, I don't envision heaven as a big fenced open space. I believe that when we die as believers, we immediately see the "real world" that God sees. If you think about it, the bible spends almost no space describing heaven itself. It is as if the bible is saying to us, "Focus on being a good witness for Me (God) now in this life and you (us) let Me (God) worry about what the next life will be like."
    - i) We do have a few clues about heaven, and these verses give some. Somehow, we do enter God's world when we die and we give Him thanks not only for saving us but also for chastening us to make a difference for Him in this world.
    - ii) Personally, I don't think we are going to spend "24/7" praising God in the next life. At the same time we are going to be doing a lot of that. I don't believe in heaven we become "robots" praising God around the clock. At the same time, I do believe we spend eternity learning to appreciate how much He loves us.
  - b) OK John, that is all good and well when we get to heaven. How do I apply it now?
    - i) For starters, it is about getting used to the idea of praising God now, because we will be doing for eternity. If we don't enjoy praising God now, I don't believe we will enjoy it much more for eternity.
    - ii) Next, the idea of gratitude to God helps our lives in many ways. I am convinced grateful people live better lives in every aspect. I am also convinced that God blessing us and us praising Him in gratitude go "hand in hand".
    - iii) The idea is that no matter what we are dealing with in life at the moment, if we start showing gratitude to God, it improves our attitude because we remember that He is in charge not us. We remember that He is allowing us to go through whatever we are going through in order to draw us closer to Him.
  - c) These verses remind us of our ultimate reward for trusting in God: That we get to be with Him forever praising Him for what He has done in our lives. That makes us victorious.



18. Verse 21: I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.
- a) OK John, I get the idea of giving God thanks. Let me explain the second phrase that says, "You have answered me". To explain that, remember that when we first call upon God for our salvation, He does answer that prayer. That is the start of our salvation.
  - b) As I have stated in this lesson, salvation is not just a "one moment thing", but also a continuous process of trusting God moment by moment. OK John, and what does that have to do with God answering us? Glad you asked. ☺ God does not say to us, "OK, now you are saved. Good luck with the rest of your life and I'll see you in heaven." Instead He is always working on our lives to guide us the way He wants us to go if we are willing to let Him guide us. The idea again, is that we show gratitude to God because (not if, but because) He is working in our lives.
    - i) OK John, explain to me again how is He guiding me. Is He physically controlling where I take my next step? That's not the idea. The idea is we study His word, learn what it is He desires of our lives, and then we make the best decisions possible based on biblical principals. I believe the best to see in hindsight how God has guided our lives whether we realize it or not.
  - c) Let me try this idea another way: Suppose there is some big decision we have to make and we don't know what God wants us to do. The answer is simply to make the best decision possible. If it turns out to be the wrong choice, God will make it obvious over time it was the wrong decision and what to do next. For people in the bible, life never went well all the time. My point is the way God guides us is to make the best decisions possible and trust that He is guiding us to do His will based on those biblical principals.
    - i) OK John, and what does this have to do with Verse 21? The answer is both in good times and bad times we give God the credit for guiding our lives. The idea is that we are continuing to count on Him for our salvation no matter what we are dealing with at any moment in time.
19. Verse 22: The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;<sup>23</sup> the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- a) We now come to the most famous verse in this psalm. Verse 22 is one of the most quoted verses in the New Testament. There are a number of places in the New Testament where Verse 22 is quoted to be about Jesus. The idea in effect is "Jesus, who was rejected by the Jewish people has become the foundation of a whole new way of understanding God."
  - b) My first question about this verse is, is that what the writer meant when it was written?
    - i) I need to go back to discuss the "when" of this psalm. Whenever it was written, it was probably used as some sort of celebration psalm. It was probably used to celebrate God's victory at some point or at the dedication of a Jewish temple.
    - ii) Religious Jewish people reading this verse may think of it as the "Jewish people" or maybe even God's laws being rejected by the world. Their trust in Him is the "capstone" of that trust in Him that has lasted for millenniums.
    - iii) In other words, Christians apply this verse to Jesus and religious Jews apply it to God's laws. So who is right here? The answer to remember that the psalms are also prophecy (i.e., predictions). There are prophetic verses all through the psalms and this is one of those places. With that said, I believe both answers are right. God did call the Jewish people to be His witnesses to the world for millenniums. Then when Jesus came into the world He Himself became the rejected "stone".
  - c) The idea about Jesus is not so much about the fact that He existed two thousand years ago. Most people accept that idea. What is rejected is the idea that He is God and that by having faith in Him, one receives eternal life.
    - i) OK John, how do we Christians apply this verse? It is about remembering who is in charge of our lives especially during difficult times. It is about trusting that God is guiding our lives to lead us to a victorious life in Him.

- d) As I studied this verse, what I kept wondering about is, "Why is this verse, here at this location?" Yes this verse is a famous prophecy about Jesus. Why is it buried here in the "Egyptian Haifa" psalms, near the end of Psalm 118? Once again, thanks for asking. ☺
  - i) Remember that this psalm is mostly about giving thanks to God for the victories of our lives. Now we get this reference to the "rejected cornerstone".
  - ii) In context, the verse is reminding us that the world has rejected what we have accepted: The idea that God is in charge of our lives and we live by the principals that He desires for our lives. What are those principals? Well, that is the main topic of the next psalm, which we'll start in the next lesson.
  - iii) Meanwhile, I still have five more verses left in Psalm 118 to discuss.
- 20. Verse 24: This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
  - a) OK we jump from the famous "Jesus is our cornerstone" verse to praise to God for the present day. The verse is saying we should rejoice today. OK, John what gives?
    - i) The idea is to say in effect, "If we are not going to praise God today, then when?"
    - ii) If we are not willing to pause today and give God the credit for guiding our lives now, then when will we do it? If we are not going to appreciate all the good things God has done for our lives now, what makes us think we will stop and do it tomorrow if we are not willing to do it today?
    - iii) But John, suppose I'm having a bad day. Why should I stop and praise Him now? Remember that praising God is about our perspective. There is nothing a believer goes through in life that God is not aware of. We can't always choose what happens to us in life, but we can at any moment choose how we react to that situation. We can choose to be miserable or choose to praise Him.
    - iv) Does that mean I can't grieve over my situation? Of course not. It just means we remember the fact that God is in charge of our lives and not us. We can and should praise Him not only for our eternal salvation, but also for the fact He is guiding us through whatever we are dealing with at any given moment in time.
  - b) This leads me back to "cornerstone". God is our cornerstone because He is the foundation that leads us not only to praise Him, but also to guide us through our lives.
    - i) To put it another way, "I don't know what God has planned for me today, but He does." Therefore, I praise Him for the fact I am saved and that I can and do choose to let God guide my life for His glory. May my life be used today to make a difference for Him and may I use those opportunities to be His witness today.
      - a) That would be a great way to end the lesson, but we are still not done yet.
- 21. Verse 25: O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success.
  - a) Speaking of prayers for making a difference for God, I present Verse 25.
  - b) First, this verse asks for God to save us. Didn't the Jewish people already believe they were eternally saved? Yes they did. I believe it was a cry out for protection against their enemies and to preserve them as a nation. This verse for us is in effect for God to "save us" so that we can continue to be used by Him. Notice that praise to God here is more than just thanking Him for the good things of our lives, but also to preserve us so that we can continue to make a difference for Him. That is the idea of not only salvation as it is used in this verse, but the request for success.
  - c) OK John, if God wants us to make a difference for Him, why ask for success? This is another reminder that our dependence is upon Him and not our own ability. We may be facing something greater than us in size or strength. The point is we can have victory because we are asking that His will be done. So does that mean God does not love the people who oppose us? Of course not. Again, it just means we are asking God that He use us to get His will done in the world. Asking for success for us is really about asking for God to choose to work through us and do His will through us.

22. Verse 26: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. <sup>27</sup> The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. <sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.
- a) By reading these verses, one can tell we were approaching the end of this psalm and this section of psalms we have covered for the last two lessons. One can tell we were near the end simply because these last few verses do focus on praising Him.
  - b) Remember that this whole section of psalms (Psalms 113-118) focuses on giving thanks to God for the good He has (and is continuing) to do in our lives. Now that we are close to wrapping up this whole section, it is ending with focusing on His blessing.
  - c) To remind all of us again, to be blessed by God is simply about the desire to do His will and following up by doing what the bible teaches us to do. (Specifically why we praise God for His word is the subject of the next psalm.) Remember we are blessed by our trust in Him. That gives us a far greater life than if we ignore Him at any given moment.
  - d) Verse 26 reminds us that if we blessed if we live according to how He wants us to live. That verse also reminds us our blessing comes from Him and not our own abilities.
  - e) Verse 27 then talks about His "light" shining upon us. The idea of light is not about sunlight or any other created light source. It is about God Himself working through us. The idea is that if we believe in God, that belief becomes an illuminated source that others should see work in our lives.
  - f) The second half of Verse 27 then has a strange reference. It says we join the festival of praising God "with boughs in hand". To explain that, think of a "bow and arrow". To explain that reference I need to explain the next phrase, "horns of the altar".
    - i) When the Jewish people sacrificed animals to God, the animals were tied to the altar. There were four horns on that altar (one per corner) that were used to tie down the animals.
    - ii) That leads me back to the "bow" (or "bough") reference. The idea is that the Israelites killed these animals to be sacrificed. God would not accept "road kill" as a sacrifice and the Israelites had to actually kill what they were sacrificing.
    - iii) OK John, tell me again why they did this. The essential idea is that sin hurts people and hurts "innocent blood". Therefore, offering up innocent recently killed animals reminded the Israelites that the sins they commit hurt the innocent.
    - iv) Christians don't offer animals, because Jesus was our sacrifice for our sins.
  - g) This psalm ends with another reminder for us to praise God and exalt Him as such.
    - i) Remember we are ending a section of psalms that began back with #113 that all focus on praising God. It would be a logical ending not only for this psalm but for this whole group of psalms to focus one last time on praising Him for leading us to Him, guiding our lives, making a difference for Him, and finally for leading us to victory "through Him" by using our lives to make that difference for Him.
    - ii) There, that was a mouthful and a good way to end this lesson. ☺
23. Verse 29: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
- a) Again, the final verse of this psalm, takes us "full circle" back to where we started. The principals of this verse repeat those stated at the beginning of this psalm. Since they are repeated, it is not necessary to discuss any more what this verse means to us.
  - b) This final verse is saying in effect, now that we realize God has called us to make a difference for Him, let us thank Him for guiding our lives and remember that His love for us endures through our entire lifetime, no matter what it is we are facing at the moment.
24. Next week, we begin Psalm 119. This is the longest psalm in the bible and the longest chapter in the bible. It is going to take more than one lesson to get through that psalm. The good news is once we make it through Psalm 119, it is "downhill from there" and we are on the final 20% of the book of Psalms. If you have made it with me this far, I'm sure God will get us through the rest.

25. Let's pray: Father, we thank You for calling us to make a difference for You. We thank You that You are guiding our lives to make that difference. We thank You for leading us away from false gods. We thank You for leading us down the path of salvation. We thank You for rescuing us through the various trials of our lives. Help us to use that past knowledge of You guiding us know that You will still be there through future trials. Finally, thank You for the victories You have given us in our lives, as we use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.