

Reflections for North Bridge Baptist Church

April 5, 2020

This week we will be looking at Psalm 118 together. This is a longer Psalm than the others that we have been studying the past two weeks, but it has several elements that are significant for study for this week. It is located just after the shortest chapter in the Bible, and just before the longest chapter.

Again this week, it would be great if you could read it out loud. If you are with family, take turns reading a verse at a time. Keep in mind that the Psalms were meant for public worship and were typically song together with a leader or musician. There were some that were written to be back and forth between leader and the people.

“His Steadfast Love Endures Forever” Psalm 118

Part I verses 1-4 “Give Thanks”

During this time many have found that life is simply not the same. It seems a great deal out of character. We may feel that our freedoms have been taken away, or that we simply cannot purchase some of the things that may feel like necessities of life. I know of three families that have simply had to change, adapt, or alter wedding plans. I was invited to a celebration for a couple of their 30 years of marriage. This has been postponed with no new date at this time. We may soon be required to wear masks if we are in public. With all that is happening, it may feel like life is inconvenient.

However, there is so much that we have by God’s provisions. Often when a crisis occurs, one realizes that one had assumed that life would never have any difficulties or rough spots. We know that this is not true, and yet, we are still surprised when they happen. This Psalm begins with the theme of ‘giving thanks’. This really ought to be our perspective at all times of life. I have found that those who are most thankful are individuals who have not had everything that they wanted in life. When a blessing comes it is cherished. We live in a country of abundance, and in a time of abundance. However, we do not always live in an attitude of ‘thankfulness’. So, how can one live this way? It only comes when one realizes that God’s steadfast love endures forever. I want to encourage you, at some time today, to make a list of the ten items that you most want to thank God for providing for you.

Part II verses 5-9 “God Is On Our Side”

The greatest of all of God’s provisions for a person in Old Testament days was his ‘loving kindness’. This is translated in our passage as ‘steadfast love’. This was a common phrase within the Hebrew language and especially scripture. It is highlighted in these verses with two examples. God provides his steadfast love when answering our prayers of distress. God provides his steadfast love in the presence of those who hate us. The psalmist goes on to say that it is far better to trust in God than in man, or even to trust in our governmental leaders. Many of these leaders have been working diligently to protect and to provide leadership, but they can only do so much. God is the one that provides the ultimate answer for

us during this time of the pandemic. Each day spend some time with Him, affirming your trust for your life into His hands.

Part III verses 10-16 “The Lord Is My Strength and My Song”

This section of the Psalm deals with God’s provisions in the midst of threat. Over the course of history, the Hebrew children, David’s kingdom, and the Jewish nation have all been threatened from a variety of nations and in a variety of ways. The threats have come from the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines, and many others. At times they did not know if they were going to survive. But God was faithful. Three times in this section it uses the phrase ‘in the name of the Lord I cut them off’. The first thing to notice is that it is only in God’s name that this happens. It is never because of our will or strength. There is a dependence on God and His power. In verse 16 we have a reference to bees and fire. Both of these refer to events that happen quickly and without control. When we experience these, they can be overwhelming. Today, we are faced with an overwhelming pandemic. In many ways it is even worse because it cannot be seen in typical ways. The writer of the Psalm would have no understanding of this enemy. However, the proclamation that comes is still the same. The Lord has become our salvation and with that comes glad songs of singing. We are not singing yet, but that day will come.

Part IV verses 17-24 “Walking Through in Celebration”

There is a confidence that the writer has within his words. His language is in future tense and is already anticipating what lies ahead. He has a confidence that he will not die. Even though he is not perfect, he is still counted among the righteous. He sees himself walking through the gate of the Lord. As he does this, there is an overwhelming sense of giving thanks to God. It is important for all to keep the proper perspective in the midst of this wonderful event to take place. There are two verses in this passage that hold the key. The first is verse 25. ‘This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.’ Every blessing, every healing, every miracle, is all from God’s hand. We are not worthy to share in this time of celebration. We only enter because of God’s grace and what he has done to make this possible.

The second verse that is loaded with significance is verse 24. We do not typically think of the book of Psalms as prophetic, but there are several Psalms that have significant implications for the coming Messiah. This verse, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” This is certainly a reference to the coming Messiah, Jesus. It is quoted in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In addition it is found in the books of Acts, Ephesians, and I Peter. Keep in mind that this Psalm was probably written 250 years before the book of Isaiah. We considered last week how God is referred to as the ‘rock’. Here, the thought is expanded to reference Jesus, and to see him as a very specific one that the whole foundation is built upon. God’s plan is being perfected in Him. We can only enter through the gates because of this foundation. What a great thing God has done! So the writer ends with a great proclamation. “Let us rejoice and be glad in it!”

Part V verses 25-29 “Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord”

This last section of the Psalm begins with a prayer. It is simply stated; “Save us, we pray, O Lord!” Even with the confidence in the preceding verses, the writer comes back to the simple prayer. There is an understanding that we need to be saved. We learn from this that prayer is not a onetime event that protects us from all the hazards of life. Prayer is a discipline that one learns over the course of life. We need this connection with our father every day of life. Sometimes, we need this connection several times in a day. Prayer should be both the start and ending of the day. As one is faithful with this discipline, ones confidence of the fathers love becomes secure.

The next verse (26) is another prophetic verse. This was shouted as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on the day we now call Palm Sunday. It is recorded in every one of the four gospels. It is the fulfillment of God’s ultimate plan to save us. This salvation is not from the threat of war or disease, but from our own personal sins. This is the ultimate salvation that only comes by God’s grace alone. I sometimes wonder how much of this plan of grace the writer of the Psalm knew when he penned these words. Did he actually have an understanding of Jesus coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey? I will never know. The Holy Spirit was working through the writers throughout the Old Testament giving us glimpses of the coming messiah.

This Psalm then ends with a great benediction. “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.”

We will not be meeting together for a few weeks. Please, continue to lift each other up in prayer. I want to specifically encourage you to life up our healthcare workers in prayer this week. Each day choose one person that you can pray for in specific ways. If you have the opportunity, send them a note or email letting them know that you prayed for them on that day.