

Psalm 118: “Resurrection Victory, Resounding Gratitude”

12 April 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship:

Good morning everybody and welcome to our Easter service, where we will be remembering and celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Today we'll be exploring and thinking through Psalm 118 and in it the Psalmist has great news to declare, and he invites a response from the nation and he invites a response from his community, the people of Israel. So let us begin our service with spoken responses regarding God and the resurrection of Jesus.

Leader: Christ the Lord is risen!

People: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Leader: He has done excellent things.

People: Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever.

Leader: Grace to you and peace from Jesus Christ, the victor, the firstborn from the dead.

People: He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever.

Praise: IPH 435 Christ The Lord Is Risen Today

Reading: Luke 24:1-8

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

Let us join together in prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Jesus as our Saviour, for asking Him to be our sacrifice, and for His saying, “not My will, but Yours be done”. Thank You for Your love, willing to give Your only Son to pay the cost of our wilful rebellion towards You. We rejoice in Your love for us and the completion of Your wonderful plan of salvation in Jesus’ resurrection. We remember Jesus’ words on the cross, “It is finished!” And today, we are glad that this proved true when Jesus rose from the grave, conquering death, claiming victory over Satan. We praise You that, by faith and our union with Him, we are free, no longer under condemnation, no longer estranged from You, no longer excluded from heaven, no longer powerless to fight sin and temptation, no longer without hope. We are a redeemed people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, who have been given eternal life. Heavenly Father, risen Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, thank You for this special day, this day to remember the glory of our salvation and with the Psalmist we say, “the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

Last week in Sunday Special, we shouted with the crowds, “Hosanna! O LORD, save us!” as Jesus rode into Jerusalem like a king. On Friday, when Jesus died, it seemed like He had failed. But Jesus

has risen as our Saviour, the King of Kings, and so we sing, "Hosanna! The LORD saves!" in our next hymn, "What A Wonderful Saviour Is Jesus".

Children's Praise: IPH 360 What A Wonderful Saviour Is Jesus

Reading: Psalm 118

Sermon:

We will remember Easter 2020 because of the crisis and the threat of the coronavirus. History will remember this period, and it would be tempting, wouldn't it, to be negative and think only of our restrictions, inconveniences, or the reality of death. But Easter brings true hope: death is defeated, Christ is alive! Psalm 118 is a song of true thankfulness so let's look at the Psalm and consider reasons to be thankful this Easter Sunday 2020.

Did you see the beautiful super moon this week? Wasn't it absolutely glorious? And it struck me that people all around the world saw it as well. These lovely warm and sunny days - I'm actually looking out through a window that shows me a blue sky, and budding trees, and the green of the grass. Isn't it good that we have food and shelter, and that we're able to say we're keeping ok? Hasn't it been lovely having friends and family and neighbours who have shown concern and have demonstrated care? You should make your own list. It's good to be thankful.

And we have been compiling our own list of reasons to be thankful as a community of Christians in Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church as we've turned to the Psalms. So in Psalm 46, we saw that God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. In Psalm 103 we saw that God longs to forgive, because as far as the heavens are above the earth so great is His love for those who fear Him. God loves us a lot. In Psalm 34 God desires deeply that we engage with Him and that we experience Him. And He says that when we do so that we will find Him to be good. And Psalm 51 - God is 100% committed to those who belong to Him, even when we mess up big time and that He longs to forgive us and that He longs to renew us. That is a tremendous list that we can give thanks for. And today, we consider a psalm of thankfulness - as I've said, Psalm 118. If you have your Bibles, it would be good to have them open so you can look at the passages together. "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good; His love endures forever" (v1). And then he encourages us in the responses in verses 2-4 to say, "His love endures forever". So the big question is:

I. What is the psalmist so thankful for?

Well, let's walk through the psalm and see. Verse 5 - answered prayer. Yes! And specifically, he is thankful for God's help (v. 7) and victory against overwhelming odds (vv. 10-12). I will read one of them. "All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off." He tells us that he was helpless, but something happened, and he triumphed, and he realises that God alone is the one who saved him (v13-14). And in light of this triumph he gives thanks in joy and victory. Verse 15 - "Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous". *I nearly died*, he says, but I will

live (vv. 17-18). So in response to what God has done he wants to go and worship God in Jerusalem and enter through its gates (v. 19). He wants to join in the victory procession and wave branches - for us that would be banners and flags (vv. 26-27). And his goal is to worship God at the holy place of sacrifice. Verse 21 is a good summary, even if a bit understated: *"I will give thanks, for You answered me; You have become my salvation."* So, the psalmist's reasons to be thankful: God helped him overcome an impossible enemy when he should have died, and he realises that God alone was responsible. How could he *not* be thankful to God? And he ends the psalm by saying that God is personal to him: "You are my God" (v. 28). And he restates his opening thanks: *"Give thanks to the LORD for He is good; His love endures forever."*

II. Christ's victory foretold

Of course, we are not the first people to read this psalm. It's interesting to think that Jesus read this psalm, as did the apostle Peter and the writer to the Hebrews (probably Paul), and they all saw within it references to Jesus. If you have a Bible with a cross reference system (which is often very useful) you will see that Psalm 118 is directly quoted *nine* times in the New Testament. And it's particularly used in a parable that Jesus told about a vineyard and tenants. He was trying to explain in a picture how God had tried to have a relationship with the people of Israel, and He had sent them prophets and leaders and ultimately Himself in His own Son, but that they had refused to listen to Him. And so Jesus uses this psalm, and verse 22, and He says *"the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"* - the central, most prominent and essential stone in the building! And Jesus says, "I'm that stone." And Peter says that He's a precious stone, and that those that see it love Him and value Him. And he also says for others He is a stumbling block. In other words, people do not want to believe in Him and He becomes a problem to them.

The psalm is also used, if you look at verses 26 and 27, and it was quoted by the crowds on that first Easter week when Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey. And they were waving their palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna!" to Him in victory. He came in peace, of course - He came on a donkey - to do battle with sin, with Satan and death. If you want to watch and to see more about that journey, look back at our previous Sunday - Palm Sunday - in the children's section, Sunday Special section, and you'll see that journey reenacted well. The victory was His triumph over death on the cross and His rising from the dead on the third day. The victory had wonderful consequences. Sin, Satan and death were all defeated.

So later on in the story of the Bible, when Peter preaches about that, he says, "God raised him (Jesus) from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen....and everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sin" (Acts 4:40-42). *Everything* forgiven. That's why He's so precious.

The apostle Paul says, "having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. . . then having disarmed the powers and

authorities, he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them on the cross” (Colossians 2:12-15). He defeated Satan and all those spiritual forces opposed to us forever.

And Paul tells the church at Corinth, in our ultimate enemy, death: “‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ . . . But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:54-57).

So, reasons to be thankful on Easter Sunday?

- God has raised Jesus from the dead!
- Sin, Satan and death are decisively defeated!
- The resurrection declares: “His love endures forever!”

III. God’s enduring love

When we say that something endures forever, we are highlighting at least two qualities. Firstly, **strength** - it’s a love that sees us through every difficulty, including our greatest difficulty and final enemy death. Isn’t that good news, news that we need in the middle of our present crisis from the threat of the coronavirus and the COVID-19? Nothing can separate us from the love of God. In all things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37-39). His love *endures* forever - it’s strong.

And secondly, it never ends, **it’s everlasting**. It’s not only for now, but for tomorrow, and in the light of resurrection it is for life beyond death. His love endures forever, it never fails. He doesn’t give up. He’s always present. He’s like the sun that always shines, even when shielded by the clouds.

I am told that Psalm 118:8 is the central verse in the whole of the Bible. It says, “*It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.*” That was the experience of the psalmist in Psalm 118. It was the experience of Jesus on the cross. And the invitation of the psalmist is that we would make it our experience as well. That we would trust in God, and that we would be able to say with him, “The LORD is good; His love endures forever.”

We have many reasons to be thankful, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest of them all. And nothing would give God or me greater pleasure than that we would be able to say every day, “The LORD is good; His love endures forever.” Amen.

This wonderful victory is ours by faith. It’s not of us, and so because of Jesus’ victory, we are assured of His promise of eternal life. Our next hymn captures this assurance in the gospel so well. *Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.*

Praise: Blessed Assurance

Prayers for Others:

Let us pray. We are thankful that we can come this morning to the God who made the earth, the air, the sea, the sky, who gave the light its birth and cares for us, and that same God who sent His Son to die on Calvary, who, if we lean on Him, will care for us. We thank You that at this time of crisis,

we can come to the One who never changes and whose ear is ever-open to our cry. We bring to You the vulnerable in our society and all who care for them. We particularly commit to You all our health care workers and those charged with making decisions regarding the safety of our citizens. We remember all students and their teachers in the uncertainty regarding the state examinations, asking that they may be able to concentrate on their studies and will have access to all available resources that they need. We pray especially for those in our own congregation, asking that God will help them to be calm and focused. We pray for those who have to be separated from loved ones at this time when we celebrate the wonder of the resurrection. We ask that children who are disappointed that they cannot spend time with their grandparents, or have egg hunts and the usual fun, will realise that the Easter message is not about fluffy chickens and furry rabbits, but a celebration of the One who died and rose again, so that we can have hope and real life. We remember grandparents separated from their offspring and grandchildren. We pray for leaders and owners of businesses having to make difficult decisions that affect the lives of their employees, that God would give them wisdom and grace. We remember before God the self-employed who have been hit particularly hard by the loss of business and often have fewer reserves to fall back upon, that He would give them peace and supply their needs. We ask for God's comfort for those who mourn, and help them to cope with the unusual and traumatic burial arrangements, praying for those who give them spiritual support. We ask that at this time You would be the comforter of the sad, the companion of the lonely, the guide of the rudderless, the healer of the sick, the shelter of the homeless, the supporter of the weak, and wisdom to those who seek it, and above all, the Saviour of all who call upon Your name, as You have promised that all who call on Your name will be saved. All our prayers we offer with thankful hearts in the strong name of our risen Lord Jesus, hallelujah! Amen.

On Friday, He bore a crown of thorns. But now the Lord Jesus, our Saviour and King, has risen victorious over sin and death, and on His head are *many* crowns as He reigns upon His throne for all eternity. So as our time together this Easter Sunday draws to a close, let's praise and give thanks to our Lord of eternal life, enduring love, and perfect peace. Let us crown Him with many crowns.

Closing Praise: IPH 449 Crown Him With Many Crowns

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.