

Sermon Notes

Psalm 118:19-23
 “The Gate of the Lord”
 An Easter Sermon Series
 April 7, 2019

Introduction

- 1) What was the last thing our Lord and His disciples did during the first Lord’s Supper?
 - a) After which He would go to the Garden of Gethsemane and be arrested.
 - b) They sang a hymn.
 - c) *“After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”* – Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26
- 2) What song did they sing? A scholarly educated guess would be Psalms 115-118.
 - a) Scholars, following ancient Jewish traditions, call Psalms 113-118 “Egyptian Hallel” psalms.¹ Ps 114:1
 - b) They were used at the great annual Old Testament festivals, especially the joyous ones of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.²
 - c) During the Passover, the gathering would sing Psalms 113-114 before the meal, and Psalms 115-118 after the meal.
 - d) So it is reasonable to think our Lord and His disciples sang this song after the first Communion.

About Psalm 118:1-18

- 1) Besides being highly regarded in the Jewish tradition³, Psalm 118 was Martin Luther’s favorite Psalm.⁴
- 2) Psalm 118 is a hymn of thanksgiving to God for the victory He has given His people against their enemies.

¹ “Hallel” is the Hebrew word meaning “to praise.” It’s the name given to several collections of psalms of praise used during worship at the Temple and the synagogue. Besides the “Egyptian Hallel” of Ps 113-118, there is the “Great Hallel” of Psalms 120-136, especially Ps 136, and the “Final Hallel” or “Hallelujah Psalms” of 146-150.

² There are three great pilgrim holidays in the OT: Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles.

Passover (or Pesah, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread) celebrates the exodus out of Egypt in March or April. (Ex 12:3-20; Lev 23:6; Deut 16:1-8)

Pentecost (or Shabuot, or Feast of Weeks, or Day of Firstfruits, or Feast of Harvest) celebrates the completion of the barley harvest in May or June. (Ex 23:16; 34:22; Num 28:26; Lev 23:16)

Tabernacles, the Feast of (or Sukkot, or the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Ingathering) celebrates the end of the year and happens in September or October. (Lev 23:34; Num 29:12-38)

Though there are many other minor feast days, the other major holiday is **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement, which was a holy convocation where Israel made offerings for their sins in September or October. (Ex 30:10; Lev 23:26-31).

³ According to Jewish tradition (Babylonian Talmud) it’s particularly tied to the Feast of Tabernacles. (Mishnah - Sukkah iv:5) It was to be antiphonally (to sing responsively) recited as part of the ancient Jewish liturgy.

⁴ “Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, I fell in love with this psalm especially. Therefore I call it my own. When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even saints could not aid me, this psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles. As a result, it is dearer to me than all the wealth, honor, and power of the pope, the Turk, and the emperor. I would be most unwilling to trade this psalm for all of it . . . Would to God all the world would claim this psalm for its own, as I do! Peace and love could not compare with such a friendly quarrel.” – Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, vol. 14, Psalm 118, preface.

- 3) You see this especially in the introduction in the first four verses.
- a) Here the people of God are called to make procession to the Temple for a service of thanksgiving. Ps 118:1,29
 - b) The people are commanded to “give thanks to the LORD.” Ps 118:1
 - i) When “*LORD*” is in all capitols this is the name of God.
 - ii) It means “I Am” the name God gave to Moses. Ex 3:13-14
 - iii) So this isn't some generic god of our imagination, but the God of the Bible.
 - c) We give thanks for a very simple reason, God “is good.” Ps 118:1
 - i) God is good, not because He conforms to goodness. As if there is some law above Him.
 - ii) But that His own nature is good, which by Himself defines goodness. Num 23:19; 2Tim 2:13; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18
 - iii) Thus stealing is wrong, because God is not a thief. Ex 20:15
 - iv) Without God, words like “goodness” are meaningless and have no objective meaning.
 - v) Because goodness and justice are mere reflections of His nature, therefore God must be a jealous God. Ex 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; Josh 24:19; Nah 1:2
 - d) Because God is good, and doesn't change, and is a jealous God, “*His lovingkindness is everlasting.*”
 - i) This is a common phrase in the Old Testament.⁵
 - ii) This phrase is to be proclaimed by . . .
 - All the people of God, i.e. “*Israel.*” Ps 118:2
 - The priests, those who lead worship, i.e. “*the house of Aaron.*” Ps 118:3
 - Any person, no matter their nationality, as long as they “*fear the LORD.*” Ps 118:4
- 4) Verses 5-18 is a detailed description of the deliverance the LORD has given the faithful from all our worldly enemies.
- a) No matter how much the world (i.e. the nations) surround the faithful, they will be cut off. Ps 118:10-12
 - b) Because “*the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.*” Ps 118:15-16
 - i) The imagery of the right hand is one of power and decisive action.⁶
 - ii) So God has acted, He has powerfully saved His people.
 - ii) This drives worship as verse 14 proclaims, “*The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.*”

⁵ 1Chr 16:34; 2Chr 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; Ps 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1,2,3,4,29; Jer 33:11 and especially Ps 136.

⁶ Ex 15:6, 12; Deut 33:2; Ps 18:35; 20:6; 44:3; 48:10; 60:5; 63:8; 74:11; 78:54; 80:15; 89:13; 98:1; 108:6; 138:7; 139:10; Lam 2:4; Hab 2:16.

- c) This deliverance is not without pain and difficulties.
 - i) It is not as if we worship the Lord to get out of worldly difficulties.
 - ii) But we know, in the end, God will redeem His people.
 - iii) As verse 18 states, *“The LORD has disciplined me severely, but He has not given me over to death.”*

Psalm 118:19-23

- 1) In verses 19-28, the main verses we will look at as we approach Easter, are a liturgy.
 - a) Liturgy is how a worship service is organized.
 - b) This liturgy is a processional to the Temple.
 - c) The Old Testament Temple was that very special building, in the capitol city of Jerusalem, where God dwelt in a unique and special way. 1Chr 22:1-19
- 2) Also remember, the Psalms are works of poetry.
 - a) It is especially important to follow that fundamental biblical reading rule: Follow and define the pronouns! (Pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, you’ll, they, them.)
 - b) In many places in this section the psalmist (the person who wrote this Psalm) speaks in the first person singular (“I”).
 - i) He is also referring to the procession of worshippers going to the Temple.
 - ii) So the reader(s) can include themselves as the speaker of the psalm.
- 3) So after the report of God's deliverance in verses 5-18, the procession (through the voice of the Psalmist) is prepared to enter the Temple to give thanks publicly to the Lord.
- 4) The psalmist/the believer/the procession calls for God’s Temple gates to be open. Ps 118:19
 - a) *“Open to me the gates of righteousness;”* Ps 24:7-10
 - i) The plural (“gates”) refers to several gates that one would have to go through to enter into Jerusalem and then to the Temple.
 - ii) Above all there is recognition that we are approaching Him who is holy.
 - b) Those who love the Lord and fear His name can do nothing else but go to Him.
 - i) Thus they boldly proclaim, *“I shall enter through them,”*
 - ii) Because the saints cannot but worship, *“I shall give thanks to the LORD.”*
 - iii) We request to officially go in and participate in the Temple rituals of the worship of the LORD. Ps 42:4; 68:24-25; Neh 12:27-47
- 5) As we (the psalmist/the procession) approach the gatekeeper responds and affirms: Ps 118:20
 - a) *“This is the gate of the LORD; The righteous will enter through it.”*
 - b) Only those who have been made righteous, pure and holy may go near God. Ps 15
 - c) Only the godly are qualified to worship in God’s Temple.
 - d) Because the LORD is a holy God and an all-consuming fire. Deut 4:24; 9:3; Josh 24:19; Is 33:14; 2Thes 1:7; Heb 10:27,31; 12:29
 - e) However, we (the psalmist/the procession) are righteous because we have known the Lord's deliverance, so we go before the Lord to worship.

- 6) We (the psalmist/the procession) enter the Temple complex and worship. Ps 118:21
- a) We publically proclaim and give thanks to God, because we can do no other, because God alone is our salvation.
 - b) *"I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation."*
 - c) The LORD *has* heard our cries and has delivered us. Ps 18:40; 30:12; 86:12
- 7) Note in verses 22-23 the voice goes from the singular ("I") to the plural. Ps 118:22-23
- a) We individually must come to church to worship the Lord, but that becomes the collective, the people of God.
 - i) All the groups from verses 2-4, Israel, the priests, god-fearers from all nations, are now of one voice.
 - ii) And they sing unto the LORD.
 - b) What the world thinks is foolish and worthless is greatly loved by the saints.
 - i) Like a stone that the builders have rejected.
 - ii) This stone has become the "cornerstone" of the foundation, or "head of the corner" or the "coping stone that crowns a section."
 - iii) This is the stone that has been elevated to special prominence.
 - c) Imagine the powerful empires of the ancient world (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome, etc.) looking at this silly, superstitious little religion of a weak and insignificant people who think their God is the only god.
 - i) Their place of worship (the Temple) is nothing compared to their grand temples.
 - ii) Yet for the worshippers of the LORD, to go through the gates and come to the Temple is *"by the LORD's doing."* Ps 118:23
 - iii) And for the faithful, those who fear the Lord, *"It is marvelous in our eyes."* Ps 118:23

Conclusion

- 1) How does Psalm 118 apply for us today?
- 2) Fundamental question that has to be answered: Where is the Gate of the Temple today?
- 3) There is no more earthly Temple (in the sense of a building).
 - a) That has been done away with. John 2:13-25; Acts 6:7-15; 1Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:11-22
 - b) The Temple worship, with its animal sacrifices, was just a shadow, figure, copy of the reality we have in Christ and the fulfillment of His New Covenant. Col 2:16-17; Heb 4:14; 8:1-6; Heb 9:1-12,23-25; 10:1ff; Rev 7:15; 11:1-2,19
- 4) We are to enter through the narrow gate, which is Christ. Matt 7:13-14; Luke 13:24
 - a) To quote the Lord Jesus, *"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."* – John 10:9
 - b) *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'" – John 14:6*

- 5) The world hates Christ (the real Jesus Christ of the Bible).
- a) He is the “chief corner stone” rejected by the world, but the only means by which God redeems His people. Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17;
Mark 12:10-11
 - b) *“He (Jesus Christ) is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”* – Acts 4:11-12
- 6) We, those fear the Lord, and know how He as delivered us from sin, Satan and God’s wrath, how can we not but go through the Gates to the Temple to worship.
- a) Now Christ is called the “Temple” in the New Testament. John 2:20-21; Rev 21:22
 - b) It is the church, Christ’s spiritual body on earth, that is the true Temple here today, because the Holy Spirit dwells within the assemblies of the faithful. Rom 8:9; 2Cor 6:16;
1Cor 3:16; 6:19;
Eph 2:21; Rev 3:21
 - c) Therefore the righteous will go to church and worship the Lord with the saints.
 - i) They are baptized active communicant members of a local assembly.
 - ii) The wicked will not. Rev 22:14-15
 - d) *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”* – Eph 2:19-22
 - e) *“For this is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,’ and, ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*
– 1Pet 2:6-10
 - f) If you know Christ, how can you not come on His (the Lord’s) Day and begin the week with the worship of the LORD with His people as you receive His Gospel in Word and sacrament?
 - g) Are these things not “marvelous” in your eyes?
- 7) Of course the final gate we go through is the Gate of Heaven into that eternal realm where there is no Temple, but just the LORD.
- a) As John writes about the revelation he was given of the new heaven & new earth:
 - b) *“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”* – Rev 21:22-27