

Palm Sunday

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?”¹¹ And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”
(Matthew 21:9–11 ESV)

Hosanna!
March 28th, 2021
Psalm 118:1-29
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! We are taking a 1 week break from our series on the Apostles’ Creed so as to allow us to deal with the line in the Apostles’ Creed that deals with the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning – that felt like a good idea to us and it gives us the chance to do a proper Palm Sunday message. So towards that end if you have your Bible with you I would love for you to open it now to Psalm 118. This is the Psalm that the pilgrims were signing with Jesus and TO JESUS as they made their way up to the mountain to Jerusalem. Brother James read that story for us just a moment ago. Matthew 21 verse 9 says:

the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9 ESV)

That is a quotation from Psalm 118 – verses 25 and 26 to be exact.

Psalm 118 is the last of the Egyptian Hallel Psalms – that’s a group of Psalms, 113-118 that were traditionally sung as pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts prescribed for the covenant community in Leviticus 23. So the fact that these pilgrims were singing this song as they made their way up to Jerusalem was not in itself remarkable – all the pilgrims were singing this song as they made their way up to Jerusalem - what is remarkable is the fact that this group of pilgrims LANDED THIS SONG on the person of Jesus Christ. They were singing this song and they were pointing at Jesus and saying: “This is the long-awaited Son

of David! Blessed is HE who comes in the name of the Lord!” They were pointing at Jesus and saying: “Hosanna!” Which is an Aramaic word that means “Save us!” “You are the one we’ve been waiting for Jesus; SAVE US!”

So that’s a pretty big deal.

And we’re not the only taking notice of that – the Pharisees were taking notice of that and they weren’t very happy with it. In Luke’s version of the story he tells us in verse 39:

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” (Luke 19:39–40 ESV)

So Jesus says to the Pharisees: “I hear them. I know what they are doing, but I am not going to rebuke them. If they didn’t land this Psalm on me, then the very stones you are walking on would do so.”

So this Psalm IS about Jesus. The crowd guessed it, the stones knew it and Jesus himself affirms it.

So, I thought it would be useful for us to revisit this Psalm so that we too could join with the praises of these pilgrims. Now, because this Psalm is a little unusual, in terms of its structure and format, I thought it might be helpful if we walked through it slowly together and then at the end we can talk about what they saw, what they missed and how we should use this Psalm as modern-day believers.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

A Guided Tour Of Psalm 118

¹ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

² Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

³ Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

This Psalm has three distinct parts to it. Verses 1-4 provide a call to worship. The song leader invites everyone in the worshipping community to join in with this song – it’s for the priests, it’s for the regular people – it’s for everybody.

Then in verses 5-21 we have the part of the song sung by the stand in for King David. So you have to VISUALIZE this – this is half PLAY, half SONG. It’s the liturgical version of musical theatre. So just, close your eyes and imagine this. Imagine a group of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem from some village in Galilee. The synagogue leader sings the call to worship: “Let the people praise him, the priests praise him, let everyone who fears the Lord say, “His steadfast love endures forever!”

Then someone with a nice voice would sing the middle section as a solo. The entire section from verse 5 to verse 21 assumes a single voice. The voice is the voice of David – and of course, that means that the Psalm in some sense would have been understood not just as being about DAVID but also as being about David’s Greater Son. That’s how DAVID functions in the overall story of the Bible. He was the ultimate HUMAN KING – and he becomes the LENS through which the people were taught to anticipate the coming Messiah.

So for example in Ezekiel 34 when God is judging and rejecting the current leadership in Israel, he says that a day will come when HE HIMSELF will rule personally over the covenant community:

“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep ... I will seek the lost ... I will bind up the injured ... I will feed them in justice.” (Ezekiel 34:15–16 ESV)

So that sounds great! God is going to come and be the leader! That’s awesome! And then God goes on to say:

“And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.” (Ezekiel 34:23 ESV)

Are you hearing that? GOD is going to be our Shepherd – and David is going to be our Shepherd. Well David has been dead for hundreds of years by the time Ezekiel 34 is written – so obviously

this means that at some point in the future God is going to take personal charge of the covenant community BY SENDING a future HUMAN LEADER in the line and pattern of David.

A leader LIKE DAVID only BETTER.

That's what these people were looking for!

So when they sang this song, they were looking back AND they were looking forward. They were remembering David and they were anticipating Messiah – and that's how WE ARE SUPPOSED TO READ IT AS WELL!! Sometimes Christians struggle with this – we think this was ONLY a Psalm about David – but it was NEVER just a Psalm about David – even before the coming of Jesus it was not JUST a Psalm about David. It was always a Psalm about DAVID and DAVID's COMING GREATER SON.

The pilgrims knew that – and we need to remember that. John Calvin reminded his people of that when teaching on this Psalm. He said:

“Let us remember that it was the design of the Spirit, under the figure of this temporal kingdom, to describe the eternal and spiritual kingdom of God's Son, even as David represented his person.”¹

So this Psalm is telling the story of something that ACTUALLY HAPPENED in David's Kingdom, but it is telling it in a way that PROPHESES something that is coming in Jesus' Kingdom – do you see that? That's what we are going to TRY and see as we read through this Psalm together this morning.

So we've had the call to worship in verses 1-4, now in verses 5-21 we get the voice of David. Imagine King David SINGING this Psalm as he made his way up to Jerusalem to worship. Here we go:

⁵ Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free.

⁶ The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

¹John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 16191.

⁷ The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

¹⁰ All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹¹ They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹² They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹³ I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.

Let me just break in quickly here to help you visualize this. Here is King David saying here that he has been sorely afflicted. He has been in a FIERCE BATTLE – surrounded by enemies on every side – but the LORD has given him victory. “I was PUSHED HARD – but the Lord has helped me!”

Now, if we’ve read the Bible, we have no problem imagining a multitude of situations in David’s life that could have given rise to this part of the song. Perhaps he was talking about one of his many battles with the Philistines, or maybe he was singing about his battle with the Edomites in the Valley of Salt – do you remember that one? In 2 Samuel 8:13-14 it says:

And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. ¹⁴ Then he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David’s servants. And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went. (2 Samuel 8:13–14 ESV)

So that’s the scene – or something very much like it. After this victory – or some other victory – David and his throng of confident followers marched in triumph and ebullient gratitude up the hills to Jerusalem to give thanks and to offer worship in the House of God.

We jump back into the story at verse 14:

¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly,

¹⁶ the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”

¹⁷ I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

¹⁸ The LORD has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

Can't you just hear David singing that song? In his days of strength – in his days of glory? Can't you see him coming up to the walls of the city and shouting out:

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

He knows he is welcome! He knows that he enjoys the Lord's favour – he has felt it – tangibly once again on the battlefield.

Now let's listen to the closing liturgy. David has sung his song – and now the people around him – we assume, originally, his fellow soldiers and the people manning the gate - sing this joyful response.

Let's hear that now; this third and final section runs from verse 22 through verse 29:

²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

²³ This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵ Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!

²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.

²⁹ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! (Psalm 118:1–29 ESV)

So, the soldiers are glad, the gate keepers are glad – we can imagine the High Priest coming out of the temple to welcome David and his train of followers in verses 26. The first greeting is singular – blessed is HE who comes in the name of the Lord; that’s David obviously, but then the High Priest says to those with him: We bless you from the house of the Lord! Any friend of David; anyone who fought with David – is welcome here.

The Lord’s face shines upon us today; now let us worship!

That’s the song – that’s the DRAMA, the liturgy – that his crowd in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday – LANDS on the person of Jesus Christ. They’ve been singing this song for YEARS but now – this year, they are landing it on Jesus!

You are the Son of David! Blessed are YOU as you come to the House of the Lord! You are the cornerstone! You are the new beginning! You are the leader sent from God! SAVE US!

Save us!

That’s what Hosanna means – it is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for SAVE US.

“Hosanna to the Son of David” – Matthew 21:9 – is this crowd of pilgrims connecting the dots and landing this Psalm on JESUS! “Hosanna! God save us! God you have saved us! Praise the Lord!”

As I said – this is a pretty big deal but of course as we keep reading we discover that this wasn’t quite the victory parade that these folks were apparently expecting – so in the time we have left, let’s talk about what they saw, what they missed and how we should use this Psalm as modern day believers.

First of all then, let’s review and summarize what these pilgrims saw.

What Did They See?

As you read the story of the Triumphal Entry within the flow of the Gospels it immediately becomes clear that these particular pilgrims have been walking with Jesus down from Galilee and up from Jericho as they together ascend the mountain of the Lord. Meaning – that these are not the same people who will shortly be clamouring for the death of Jesus – those people were the residents of Jerusalem stirred up into an angry mob by the chief priests and elders – we’re told that in Matthew 27:20. These people, though, are Galilean pilgrims – so we have two different crowds. One looks at Jesus and sees a threat that has to be eliminated – and the other looks at Jesus and sees everything that the people of Israel have been waiting for. They see the Son of David! They see the Messiah! They see the promised Prince from God!

They’ve been walking with Jesus and they’ve been SEEING some remarkable things. If you have your Bible with you flip forward now to Matthew 21 – the story of the Triumphal Entry is told in verses 1-11. But look at the story that comes immediately before that. As I said, these people have been walking with Jesus down from Galilee to Jericho which is where the road turned right and began to wind up the mountain toward Jerusalem. But look at what happens in the city of Jericho as they pass through – verse 29 of Matthew 20 says:

And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him.³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, “What do you want me to do for you?”³³ They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.”³⁴ And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. (Matthew 20:29–34 ESV)

Are you seeing that? In all likelihood, these two former blind men were in this worshipping crowd as Jesus walked up to Jerusalem! They were singing this song and quite possibly leading the way in landing it with all of its prophetic and theological implications SQUARELY on the person and work of Jesus! And why not? They had just LIVED IT! They knew from experience – that this was the long-awaited SON OF DAVID! He was the Good Shepherd of Ezekiel 34!

Weak sheep were being lifted up – broken sheep were being bound up - what more could anyone reasonably be looking for?

This is the guy – and now is the time!

That’s where the crowd was at – and bless them for it! Who could blame them for missing what they missed? But they did miss something – did you catch it?

What Did They Miss?

The end of Psalm 118 says this:

“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!” (Psalm 118:27 ESV)

Now in the original context that would have been something said by the High Priest to David the chief worshipper. Welcome home, victorious son! Now, lead us in a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise!

Hallelujah!

And so the crowd probably expected something similar.

They expected Jesus to walk up to the temple and for the High Priest to say: Welcome home victorious Son! Lead the way – lead us all now – in a time of sacrifice and worship!”

But it didn’t go that way did it?

You see, what the crowd didn’t see – and what nobody in the Old Testament had seen – was that the Son of David would be MORE than the Son of David – he would be conquering hero, beloved King, High Priest and ATONING SACRIFICE – nobody saw that coming. Other than, maybe John the Baptist. He saw that – he pointed at Jesus and said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV)

So this story doesn’t end the way everyone thinks it will end – because the King is the Priest is the Lamb. I love what Derek Kidner says here, he says:

“In that week when God’s realities broke through his symbols and shadows (cf. Heb. 10:1), *the horns of the altar* became the arms of the cross, and the ‘festival’ itself found fulfilment in ‘Christ our passover’.”²

Are you seeing that? The crowd saw Jesus as their Saviour but they did not yet see him as their sacrifice. But they would. Later that week, contrary to all expectation they would see the body of Messiah hanging on a cross.

You see the crowd in our story is just catching up to Peter here. You remember Peter in Matthew 16? Jesus asked the disciples, who do you say that I am? And Peter replied:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16 ESV)

Exactly right Peter! Peter was seeing everything that these people were seeing, and maybe a little bit more. But just like them he was missing something. Jesus tried to fill him in, he said the Son of Man:

“must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” (Matthew 16:21–22 ESV)

Do you remember that? Peter didn’t see this, the crowd didn’t see this – nobody saw this!

Everyone in this story – other than Jesus - thought that all they needed was a champion – a hero - because the only problems they could see were on the outside. The Romans! That’s our problem! We need to get rid of the Romans! The Sanhedrin is corrupt – that’s our problem! We need to get rid of the leaders! But actually, those things were not the most important problem. The most important problem was their own wickedness and sin.

They didn’t see that – but how many of us see that?

²Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 450.

We always think that the problem is OUT THERE. The problem is THE SYSTEM. The problem is THE GOVERNMENT. The problem is SOCIETY. But the Bible says, No, no, no, the ultimate problem is you.

G. K. Chesterton was once asked to contribute an essay addressing the question: What is wrong with the world?

He wrote back to the publisher with his 2 word submission on a half-slip of paper. It said simply: “I am.”

That’s exactly right.

Jesus said:

“out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”²⁰ These are what defile a person.” (Matthew 15:19–20 ESV)

You see, that is the issue! And that is why this crowd could not simply march up with Jesus, the Greater Son of David into the very presence and fellowship of the Lord – they were missing something!!!

Look again at verse 20. Listen to what Messiah says:

“This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.” (Psalm 118:20 ESV)

Well that’s a problem, friends, because, according to the Bible:

“There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10 NKJV)

So as we move from the TYPE to the ANTITYPE – we have ourselves a problem. We can’t just enter through the Gates of the Celestial City on the coattails of King Jesus – because we have a sin problem. And our sin won’t fit through that Gate. So before this Victory Parade can really get

going – there is a whole OTHER BATTLE that Jesus is going to have to fight for us – and they didn't see it.

They thought it was over – but Jesus knew that the real battle was about to begin.

Like David, Jesus had a GIANT STILL TO SLAY before he could enter Jerusalem in Triumph. He had to face the cross. He had to face the wrath of God. He had to drink the cup. He had to absorb the curse – he had to do ALL THAT FOR US so that we could join him in the Presence and in the Worship of the Lord.

He had to go down to bring us up.

That's what they missed. They didn't understand the significance of sin so they didn't understand the necessity of the cross – so they were RIGHT but not right enough.

So that brings us to our last question, how should we – as modern-day believers - make proper use of this Psalm?

How Should We Use Psalm 118?

That's what the Psalms are for, by the way, I trust you know that. The Psalms are supposed to TUNE and CORRECT our AFFECTIONS. St. Augustine told his people:

“Form thy spirit by the affection of the Psalm... If the Psalm breathes the spirit of prayer, do you pray; if it is filled with groaning, groan also thyself; if it is gladsome, do thou rejoice also; if it encourages hope, then hope thou in God; if it calls to godly fear, then tremble thou before the divine majesty; for all things therein contained are mirrors to reflect our own real characters.... Let the heart do what the words signify.”³

What then is the spirit of this Psalm? I think we'd have to agree that it is, primarily a Psalm of JOY and GRATITUDE!

³ W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2016), 6.

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! – that’s how this Psalm STARTS and that’s how this Psalm ENDS – so from front to back this is a Psalm of thanksgiving!

So form thy spirit by the spirit of this Psalm – but form it FULLY. Make sure you are giving thanks for ALL OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN CHRIST TO SECURE OUR SALVATION.

Thank him for the victories that he has won!

Thank him for the EYES that he has opened!

Thank him for the future he has guaranteed!

And thank him for the cross – don’t forget about that. Because without that – you would be left outside. I would be left outside. Because:

Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22:15 ESV)

That’s me friends – and that’s you. That’s what’s in my heart and that’s what is in your heart and that’s what the cross of Jesus Christ was intended to address. So:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (Revelation 22:14 ESV)

That’s what the crowd was hoping for – and that’s what we have now through the person and work of Jesus - thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.