

Pastor Kory's Page

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Giving Thanks – Psalms Style

"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!"

(Psalm 118:1) These words, which many Christian families use for returning thanks to the Lord at the dinner table, have been handed down to us from the Psalmists (most notably, Psalms 118 and 136). For me, they are very familiar words which I have known and prayed for most of my life. However, sometimes the most familiar things can be taken for granted. We can forget to reflect on what these words of Scripture mean for us.



One misconception of giving thanks is that it is something we do only out of a feeling of happiness, such as when life seems to be going our way. But is life ever really going exactly the way we want it to go? And if we wait to give thanks to the Lord until life is *just right*, when will we ever get around to it?

I'd encourage you to take a moment to read Psalm 118 this week. As you hear these words, do you get the impression that everything has been going smoothly for the Psalmist and for Israel? While the Psalm speaks of having been delivered by the Lord, notice also what he has endured: distress (v. 5); people's hatred (v. 7); the necessity of taking refuge in the Lord (v. 8); being surrounded by persecutors like a swarm of bees (v. 12); and feeling pushed to the point of falling (v. 13). No wonder the Psalmist cries out, *"Save us [Hosanna!], we pray, O LORD!"* (v. 25).

Psalm 118 is typical of many Psalms in that it speaks both of trouble and triumph, oppression and praise. In other words, the Psalms reflect our real-life ups and downs. Despite the Psalmist's troubles, he focuses on God's *greatest* gifts: His steadfast love (a Hebrew expression referring to God's loyal devotion to His people, no matter what) and His salvation: *"The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation ... I thank You that You have answered me and have become my salvation!"* (v. 14 & 21)

Sometimes we sit down to enjoy wonderful feasts, such as you might share on Thanksgiving Day. Surrounded by good

company and good food, we rightly exclaim, *"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!"* At other moments in life, we may not feel as thankful. We might be sitting down to a lonely meal of scant leftovers. But nevertheless, *God's greatest gifts are still yours in Christ*: He is your salvation and He loves you with an everlasting love! Whether in plenty or in want, we rightly give thanks to the Lord.

The words of Beth and Matt Redman's song, "Blessed be Your Name," also teach us to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18). Some days, life flows with "streams of abundance" from the Lord, but at other times we walk "on the road marked with suffering." In either case, we respond with a chorus of praise and thanksgiving to our God from whom all blessings flow: *"Every blessing you pour out I'll turn back to praise. When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say, 'Blessed be name of the Lord!'"*

Returning to Psalm 118, we see how it directs our attention to Jesus. Numerous New Testament passages cite v. 22, *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"* as referring to Jesus' rejection by men, but also His foundational death and resurrection for us. The crowds on Palm Sunday exclaimed the words of v. 25 & 26 as they hailed Jesus as their Messiah, *"Hosanna!" "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"*

Jesus Himself would have given thanks to His Father by singing the words of Psalm 118 at the close of the Passover Meal. Psalms 113-118 functioned like the opening and closing hymns of the Passover observance. Jesus and the disciples would have sung Psalm 118 just prior to His arrest and betrayal in Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday (Matt. 26:30). Imagine that: Jesus repeatedly giving thanks to and praising the Lord on the verge of His passion! Jesus would have sung *"This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!"* (Ps. 118:24) even though He was less than 24-hours from His death. Jesus gave thanks in all circumstances, even as His heart was weighed down by His impending suffering. It is because of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection for us that we give thanks! Whether we're experiencing life's highs or lows or some combination of both, God's people always have reason to say, *"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!"* (Psalm 118:29) May the Lord give us thankful hearts this Thanksgiving and in all circumstances, especially "counting the blessing" of Jesus Himself!

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Kory Janneke