

# The Hymn of Victory

Psalm 118

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Psalm 118 is a collection of psalms (from Ps. 113 to 118) that are termed 'The Egyptian Hallel' (*Hallel* meaning praise in Hebrew). They were sung by the Jews as a reminder of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. Psalm 118 was the last hymn Jesus sang before His betrayal and crucifixion.

## Unpacking Psalm 118 – the Hymn of Victory

The original setting of Psalm 118 is that of a festive procession to Jerusalem.

### **1. The victorious declaration (vv. 1-4)**

The psalm begins with a declaration that called all who worshipped *Yahweh* to give thanks to the *LORD* for He is good; His steadfast love endures forever (vv. 1-4). While such declarations are good, one problem that might arise for worshippers is religiosity – mouthing words without meaning it. While we honour God with our lips, our hearts are often far away from Him.

### **2. The victorious testimony (vv. 5-18)**

An individual, representing his nation, gave his personal testimony of victory here (vv. 5-18). A victory in a testimony must mean salvation – it is a testimony of how God has saved. This model testimony of victory for all of us has 3 parts:

#1 Suffering (vv. 5-9) – the psalmist was experiencing great suffering.

#2 Hostility (vv. 10-16) – Amidst suffering and hostility that threatened the psalmist, it was the *LORD* that fought for him.

#3 Divine chastening (vv.17-18) – The divine chastening of the *LORD* will not lead to death but life.

Whether in the face of suffering, hostility, or divine chastening, trust in the *LORD*. The *LORD* saves us!

There is heavy repetition throughout Psalm 118:

- The Lord is on my side (vv6,7 – 2 times)
- Better to take refuge in the *LORD* (vv8,9 – 2 times)
- All nations surrounded me, they surrounded me (vv10,11,12 – 3 times)
- In the name of the *LORD*, I cut them off (vv10,11,12 – 3 times)
- The right hand of the *LORD* (vv15,16 – 3 times)

The repetition shows the emotional depth of the song and serves to intensify and shape the emotions of those who sung it. As we hear Jesus' voice and testimony, we too find our voice and testimony.

### **3. The victorious entry (vv. 19-26)**

vv. 19-26 – Different individuals sang this part: The King Himself (vv19, 21), the temple keepers [Levites] (v20), and followers of the King (vv. 22-24). As the people sang, they were reminded that they were a nation of slavery raised to significance by God through their deliverance out of Egypt. The song also points to Jesus Christ, the rejected stone, becoming the cornerstone in His death and resurrection. Those who follow Him are also led from death to life. That means for us as Christians, we must prioritise King Jesus' testimony!

While the people cried out for salvation in the earthly sense (vv. 25-26) during Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus revealed that He was bringing something even better – a day when Christ will come again to earth to bring His followers, victoriously over sin and death, to the heavenly gates of righteousness (Matt. 23:39). The steadfast love of the *LORD* never ceases!

### **4. The victorious sacrifice (vv. 27-29)**

v27 – Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, willingly bound Himself (by the cords of covenantal

love) on the cross as a sacrifice for His followers. As Jesus perfectly bound Himself as a sacrifice for our sake, we now can also bind ourself as a living sacrifice to God for His sake. In the spiritual realm, true heartfelt praise has to be a sacrifice; a sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15). Psalm 118 ends with declaration of thanksgiving (v28) and a repetition of verse 1; this time with greater conviction and insight as a victorious sacrifice of praise (v29).

Ultimately, we know that the steadfast love of the *LORD* endures forever, because of the enduring love of Jesus Christ. Give thanks to the *LORD*, for He is good! For His steadfast love endures forever!