

Psalms of Praise—Hallel Psalms

Psalm 117-118: “ECHO GOD’S BLESSINGS BACK TO HIM”

INTRODUCING THE PSALMS

- + In total unselfishness God showers us with His blessings. It is totally appropriate for us to acknowledge Him as our Giver and Source, expressing our thanks by praising Him. Psalms 113-118 are called the “Egyptian Hallel” psalms, because they highlight the exodus, when God allowed close to 2 million Jews safely to leave Egypt. As Martin Luther King said, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we’re free at last.”
- + It’s a “slam dunk” that Israel through the ages read (or chanted) these psalms at the time of Passover. Psalms 113-116 were sung at the beginning of Passover, and Psalms 117-118 at the end. It is very likely that at the end of the Maundy Thursday celebration Jesus and His disciples sang these two psalms before they departed for Gethsemane for His arrest, trials, suffering, and death.
- + Are we too stingy in our praises of God, or half-hearted? Or do we excuse ourselves by saying, “I’m not the expressive, touchy-feely type”? There are relative degrees of expressiveness. For some introverted individuals, raised eyebrows or a slight flair of the nostrils is their equivalent of shouting from the housetops.
- + These two psalms give a shout of praise to say: THANKS TO YOU, O GOD, FOR FREEING US FROM SIN, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL.

The Psalms in Detail

Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, and the exact middle of the Bible. Martin Luther claimed that the whole book of Acts was an outgrowth of this Psalm, with its emphasis on inviting the nations (=Gentiles) to join Israel in praising God. This psalm urges us to praise God for His two main attributes: His *love* and his *faithfulness*. In response to those two attributes, we have the opportunity to have **faith** in Him our Savior and Lord, and exercise **love** for Him and our neighbor.

When We Are Cornered, Squeezed . . . then Rescued by God

Psalm 118 vividly depicts the dilemmas that His chosen people faced. Metaphorically the psalmist describes bees swarming around them (v 12), when they were surrounded by hostile nations. beginning with Egypt, and extending to all the tribes and mini-nations like the Philistians (from which comes the name Palestinians), Moabites, Edomites, Hivites, etc.

- + Question: When we feel surrounded, out-gunned, and overwhelmed, *who* is cornering us? The counterfeit one would claim that God is, that He demands what we have not been supplied with; that God is being totally unreasonable with us. Or, is it he, the evil one who is using every trick in the book to trip us up. He tries to get us to misunderstand God, and drop our “charade” of faith. It is true that we

are challenged, but as God's sons and daughters whom He loves.

God Rescues Us in Timely Ways.

- + The psalmist uses two analogies for the victory God grants us: Our enemies died out as quickly as thorns from a dead thornbush that crackles, burns, and crashes. The other is that God enabled Israel to cut off their enemies (at the pass).
- + The psalmist uses the literary device of doubling, even tripling phrases: "It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes" (vv. 18-19). "The Lord's right hand has done: [three things]" (vv 15-16).

We Respond by Praising and Thanking God

- + We show our gratitude by enthusiastic "Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord." Picture a vaunted department store sale, like former Dayton's "13 Hour Sale." As the doors were poised to open at 7:00 am, the excitement would mount. Then the processional group would stream into the temple, even dancing up to the horns (corner projectiles) of the altar, which were considered the holiest parts.

The Rejected Stone Has Become the Chosen Cornerstone

- + After the exile, the returning exiles began the rebuilding of the temple, the so-called "Second Temple" under the leadership of Zerubbabel. A massive block was at first rejected, but that decision was reversed, and it was used to hold the southwest corner of the outer wall, to keep the structure from sliding down into the Valley of Hinnom. That name later becomes in Greek Gehenna, Jerusalem's always-burning rubbish heap, and became the alternate word for hell-fire. So the cornerstone was to keep God's people from sliding down to hell!
- + This is the great reversal: God's chosen instrument, His Son, was first rejected by His own people, but was in fact the means the Father used to reconcile people to Himself. We humbly thank God for Christ's cross, His means of our salvation.

LIVING PSALMS 117-118

- 1. A clear indication that we've internalized God grace and mighty works is whether we "echo" God's blessings back to Him.**
- 2. We celebrate the freedom God gave us in Christ by celebrating, thanking, and praising God.**
- 3. It's appropriate for us to "push the praise envelope" once in a while. God uses such worship experiences to melt our fears, deepen our faith, and focus our hope on His Word, mighty works, and promises.**