

## Give Thanks 11-18-07

### Psalm 118

We are going to diverge from our Genesis study and have a special message today on giving thanks. Throughout Scripture to "give thanks" is synonymous with prayer. Jesus "gave thanks" and broke the bread, both at the feeding of the 5000 and the Last Supper. (John 6:11; Mark 8:6) King David assigned priests whose chief duty was to give thanks and praise in songs. (1Chronicles 16:41) On occasion they would make petition, but their regular songs were of thanks and praise to God. When King Jehoshaphat's army went out to meet vastly superior forces, singers went in front and sang, "Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever." 2Chronicles 20:21 When was the last time you prayed and just thanked God, no requests, no confession, just thanks and praise?

If the people of the Bible saw that prayer is chiefly concerned with giving thanks to God, perhaps our emphasis needs to shift. Please understand that I'm not saying you should refrain from asking for God to intervene in lives and situations, not at all! (Jeremiah 33:3) But I am saying the emphasis should be on praise and thanks, not on the requests. I think the American church has grown so used to our abundant blessings that we forget how inundated we are with goodness from the hand of God. We take it for granted. We are the most blessed nation on earth and we whine about everything. I think our favorite national pastime isn't football or baseball, but whining. It just shows how focused we are on the temporal. (Psalm 23:6)

There is one way to turn that around. Take the blessings away! I'm concerned that the Lord may have to take away His hand of protection and blessing that we might learn to be thankful for the abundance that is ours, but that is another message for another time.

Psalm 118 has more commands for us to give thanks to the Lord than any other chapter in Scripture. This morning, let's take a look at this Psalm and see what it can teach us about having a heart of gratitude.

It begins with Israel's national anthem. <sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Yes, the ancient national anthem only had one line, and you can bet they didn't just sing it once. The song in this exact form is quoted seven times in Scripture and there are a number of slight variations. Apparently David wrote it when the ark was brought to Jerusalem. (1Chronicles 16:34)

The passage doesn't say we should, or you might want to consider... It gives us a command to give thanks. How do we give thanks? We can give it in prayer, or in song. It usually is expressed in words, but can be expressed in actions as well, such as sacrifice. That is why the Jews had a thank offering. (Leviticus 7:12) Thanks must be expressed in some way. Silent thanks is of little or no value. How can your heart be filled with gratitude and not convey that gratitude in some word or action? We have to be honest with our own behavior and examine whether or not we are truly grateful people.

**Commented [notes1]:** 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

**Commented [notes2]:** 6 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so.

**Commented [notes3]:** 41 With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the LORD, "for his love endures forever."

**Commented [notes4]:** 3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

**Commented [notes5]:** 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

**Commented [notes6]:** 34 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

**Commented [notes7]:** 12 "If he offers it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering he is to offer cakes of bread made without yeast and mixed with oil, wafers made without yeast and spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil.

We are either grateful people, or we are self-centered beings that think we deserve everything good because ... well, just because. That is another way of saying we are deluded by pride. Some people think of hell as a place where the prideful have to endure one another. (Psalm 10:2) Selah.

**Commented [notes8]:** 2 In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.

Humble people realize that they deserve nothing. We did nothing to deserve anything special. We did not create ourselves or the things we need. Life and daily necessities are a gift from our Creator. Everything comes from our Creator. You might think man came up with that Ipod, or some other cool gadget you desire, but who gave man the creativity and talent to create such things. Do you have anything that was not given to you? (Isaiah 10:15)

**Commented [notes9]:** 15 Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood!

If everything, and I mean every single thing, we have is a gift, then how very grateful we should be! (1Corinthians 4:7) That is the second thought in the first verse. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good... He isn't a hard, merciless, dictator; He is good! The God of Scripture is the best imaginable God and He is real. Everything He does is good. (Psalm 119:68) He punishes evil. He rewards the righteous. He made a way for all who will come to Him to be reconciled. He plans out our eternity with our best interest in mind. He loves us! Can you imagine a better God? He only commands us to stay away from things that are destructive to us. What a good God! We are duty bound to thank Him for being so good! That is what the psalmist was saying.

**Commented [notes10]:** 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

**Commented [notes11]:** 68 You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.

When David wrote the psalm, the Ark of the Covenant had come to Jerusalem. The last time he tried to bring it, using practices forbidden in Scripture, someone died. (2Samuel 6:6-7) When the psalm was written, they were doing it by the Book. The presence of God was coming to rest among them. They were giving thanks and dancing with joy because God is good. If they were so overjoyed that the presence of God was going to be nearby in a tent, how grateful should we be that He is living in us? (John 14:23) How good of God is that? And have you expressed your utter gratitude for that remarkable reality?

**Commented [notes12]:** 6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.

**Commented [notes13]:** 23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

The song goes on to explain what goodness of God the psalmist is referring to. "His love endures forever." The love that God has for us is not diminished because we fail to be perfect. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. (John 3:16) That love is forever because of what Jesus has done for us. That can't be changed. He even loves those He will judge. God is love. (1John 4:8) Even His wrath is expressed in perfect harmony with His love. I disciplined my children because I love them. Many people may grow cold hearted and refuse to love, but God's love endures forever. Is that something to give thanks about? If we don't break out in prayer or song now and then we don't get it. We don't realize how much we are loved, or in our hardheartedness we fail to appreciate it sufficiently.

**Commented [notes14]:** 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

**Commented [notes15]:** 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

We spent a lot of time on that first verse because it says it all, and it is repeated throughout this psalm and the Bible. Verses 2-4 tell us Israel (the chosen people of God), and the house of Aaron (that is the priests), and all who fear the LORD should say, "His love endures forever."

Which part applies to us? It all does! The Apostle Paul very clearly says that those in Christ are grafted into Israel. (Romans 11:17-18) He declares us to be recipients of the promises to Israel. (Galatians 3:29) He even refers to the Israel of God as opposed to flesh and blood descendents of Israel. So this applies to us. I'm not talking about replacement theology; I'm just saying this is for us too. Not only that but we are priests. (1Peter 2:5) Every believer has a direct line to God via the Holy Spirit and intercedes for the lost. That is a priest. We offer sacrifices of praise. And we are also those who fear (or if you prefer "reverentially respect") the LORD. Every one of those verses tell us, the redeemed believers, to say, "His love endures forever."

**Commented [notes16]:** 17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

**Commented [notes17]:** 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**Commented [notes18]:** 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, you may have gone through, or be going through, a tough time. You may not understand what God has allowed. The sins of others may be crushing you at the moment or in the past, and you might ask, "Are you sure Pastor Paul? Are you sure His love endures forever?" The psalmist was sure. That is why he uses that word "let". Let us say it! Allow yourself to be convinced. Get your eyes off yourself and look at the cross and in spite of the evil in the present world, know that God's love endures forever. What a reassurance! As a recent popular song says, "It's Friday but Sunday is comin!" It may be pain and suffering now, but resurrection is just a few days away.

If it was all easy, why do you think the Apostle would say that we should comfort each other with the truth of resurrection? (1Thessalonians 4:18) Why would he say that if "in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable"? (1Corinthians 15:19) Let me give you a warning. If you aren't longing for heaven, you've gotten a little too comfortable with your compromised life in this world. Let us say, "His love endures forever!" Our hope is fixed on the love of God that is forever and ever and ever.

**Commented [notes19]:** 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

**Commented [notes20]:** 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

<sup>5</sup> *In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.* <sup>6</sup> *The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?* This is what I have been saying. Believers have anguish. All people have anguish. We live in a fallen world among fallen people. We are fallen and our transformation is not yet complete. (1John 3:2) Because of that, we face the trials of life, some more than others, but we all face them. We cry out to the LORD. He sees us through to the other side every time. Has He ever failed to help you get through a hard time? Has He ever walked away and left you helpless? Never! Sometimes the setting free is only in our spirit but it is a setting free nevertheless. And here is the most incredible and unexplainable comfort, "*the Lord is with me.*" There can be no greater comfort. Why is that such comfort? Because we know His love endures forever.

**Commented [notes21]:** 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Because of that we can say with the psalmist, "*I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" The man or woman who is truly living in Jesus can be free from fear. (1John 4:18) Do you realize that is what torments the unbeliever on a daily basis? Some of you have forgotten what that was like; it has been so long since you experienced it. We think, "What if I get fired? What if my sin from years ago is found out? What if ...", you name it. I will not be afraid. In other words, I have set

**Commented [notes22]:** 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

my will to refuse to allow fear into my heart, because Almighty God is with me. If Almighty God is with me, what can any human being or group of people do? If the whole world were to rise up to do me harm, God will have His way. He is my shield. What can mankind do to me apart from the will of God? (Isaiah 51:12)

**Commented [notes23]:** 12 "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass,

You might say, "Wait a minute! They can and have done many things that have caused believers pain." Yes, it is true, yet in the midst of it all God is with us and using those things to teach us compassion, to strengthen our faith, and to draw us closer to Himself. (Romans 5:3-5) You saw it as a hardship, but God was allowing the evil of others to bless your life. It happened throughout Scripture. He allowed Jacob to meet Laban to teach him about his own nature. He allowed Paul to have a thorn to teach him to rely on God's strength. (2Corinthians 12:7) He allowed persecution and martyrdom to get the early Christians out of Jerusalem and out into the world like He had commanded them. (Acts 1:8) He works the same way in your life and mine. So, what can man do to me? Plenty! But what God allows will be used to make us more Christ like, and that is why you do not need to fear it. (Romans 8:28) That is another reason to be thankful. Fear should have no power over the true believer.

**Commented [notes24]:** 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

**Commented [notes25]:** 7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

**Commented [notes26]:** 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

**Commented [notes27]:** 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**Commented [notes28]:** 7 We live by faith, not by sight.

<sup>8</sup> *It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.* This is the center verse of the entire Bible. I don't think it is coincidence. The stories of Scripture teach us again and again that we need to put our trust in the LORD. Every time man looks to his own strength, he fails. Every time he looks to the LORD, he succeeds. But relying on the unseen takes faith. (2Corinthians 5:7) The reason we are so prone to trust in self is that we lack faith. We discount and explain away the many times the LORD has rescued us.

**Commented [notes29]:** 7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

This is another reason to give thanks. When you truly make the LORD your refuge rather than man, look what security you have. Man can rarely take a bad situation and turn it around to be a valuable lesson, or even a great victory. But God does that on a regular basis. Thank God He is all-powerful to be your only safe refuge. (Psalm 46:7) Whatever you are going through today, look to the LORD first and foremost. It is definitely better to trust Him than trusting in what feeble man can do.

<sup>14</sup> *The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.* Here are three reasons in a row to give thanks. The LORD is our strength. When we are weak, He will see us through. When we don't feel we can go on, we can depend on His strength. (2Corinthians 12:10) His resources are infinite. We never need fear Him being inadequate to meet our need.

**Commented [notes30]:** 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

He's our song. That song of thanks that wells up within is the LORD. Abraham first said that. (Exodus 15:2) The LORD is the One the song is about. We sing of His glorious attributes, His power to deliver us, His love that comforts and assures us, and His grace that is greater than all our sin. Countless songs have been written and countless more will be written about Jesus. No other reason can come close to filling our hearts with the songs of who He is, and everyone is a song of thanks.

**Commented [notes31]:** 2 The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

*He has become our salvation.* Jesus' name (Yeshua) means the salvation of YHWH. Oh, that is by far the easiest one for me to comprehend and give thanks for. Where would we be without that? How could He so love us that He would go to the extent of the cross? But He did! When we realize that our hearts should swell with gratitude.

*<sup>15</sup> Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"* He leads us to victory over our weak natures, over the temptations that bombard us, over the world that seduces us and we shout for joy. (2Corinthians 3:18) It is a shout of thanks. And by the way, the tent in which the shout resounds is your body. We shout a shout of thanks because the LORD has done mighty things in us and will do mighty things through us when we yield to His Spirit. (Psalm 30:1-2) Can you believe Almighty God would even use you and me?

**Commented [notes32]:** 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

*<sup>19</sup> Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.*  
*<sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. <sup>21</sup> I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.* No wonder Jesus referred to Himself as the gate. (John 10:7) We see the psalmist looking in faith to God making a way for him to be made righteous. It is through the righteousness of The Gate, Christ Jesus. The next verse, verse 22, Jesus used to refer to Himself. (Matthew 21:42) Why do we give thanks? Because He answered our desperate plea for forgiveness, gave us His righteousness, and became our salvation. The gates are open to all who will enter in. But some will refuse to enter the provision God has made for them. (Matthew 7:21)

**Commented [notes33]:** 1 I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me.  
2 O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me.

**Commented [notes34]:** 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

**Commented [notes35]:** 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' ?

*<sup>24</sup> This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* This isn't a message for Thanksgiving alone; it's a message for everyday of our life. Every day we can have joy and be glad because in spite of our circumstances God is still the awesome God He has always been, and He will see us safely home.

**Commented [notes36]:** 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

*<sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.* I will! The psalmist is making a declaration. He has commanded us to give thanks for all God's goodness. Now He is declaring that He will. He claims God as His own because God has called him His own. He will exalt God, which is to speak of the wonder of who He is. That is what He has been doing throughout the psalm. He has been speaking of the greatness and faithfulness of God. Is the LORD your God? Will you exalt Him? (Psalm 146:2) Will you choose to exalt Him with your life?

**Commented [notes37]:** 2 I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

And just in case we missed something, the psalmist closes the way he opened, with the national anthem of ancient Israel. I think they needed this because they tended to murmur rather than to give thanks, an all too human tendency. Perhaps we need it for the same reason. Can we adopt this as the theme song of Wayside Chapel? <sup>29</sup> *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.* Are you thankful? Do you declare it? Do you sing it? Will you exalt Him?