

“Powerful Purpose Forever”

(Part 2)

Psalm 118.15–29

¹⁵Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!

¹⁶The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”

¹⁷I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

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

¹⁹Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

²¹I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

²²The stone the builders rejected
has become the [chief cornerstone];

²³the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

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

²⁵O LORD, save us;

O LORD, grant us success.

²⁶Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine upon us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.

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

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

[NIV]

HOPE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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6th September, 2009

I. Introduction

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”^{Ps118.1} “I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”^{v13-14} God’s love is his unchangeable intent and work to improve our estate. A great improvement he makes! He delivers us out of the estate of sin and misery, and into the estate of salvation by the Redeemer, his own Son Jesus Christ. Out of the estate of hopeless futility, anguish, torment, and into the estate of everlasting righteousness, justice, mercy, and truth.

Only an infinitely good God could continually improve an infinitely good estate. That is what he does for us. He delivers us into an infinitely good estate of salvation. Yet as we are finite creatures, he continues to improve our estate for all eternity. Christ is our infinitely good inheritance in heaven. He is already ours. Yet for all eternity, we will be growing in our knowledge of Christ. It does not get any better than forever getting better!

Now that the psalmist in the first 14 verses has beheld the beginning of things forever getting better, he takes stock of his estate. His survey finds Joy for the Righteous, Purpose for the Righteous, Foundation for the Righteous, and Place for the Righteous. What more could you ask for? These are the fundamental needs with which we are created. I wonder if Abraham Maslow read this psalm when developing his theories of motivational needs?

II. Joy for the Righteous (15-16)

Speaking of Maslow’s needs, it might be an interesting study for a seminary student to show how the Psalms we’ve read this summer (110-118) aptly proclaim the satisfaction of the entire hierarchy of needs. For example, physiological: ^{111.5}“He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.” Or self-actualization: ^{111.7}“The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.” Psalm 111 itself covers the spectrum; together these nine psalms will surely provide all the “felt-needs” we could conjure up! But enough of psychology; we’re here for Psalmology.

First in his survey, the psalmist gushes forth in *joy for the righteous*. ¹⁵“Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: ‘The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things! ¹⁶The LORD’s right hand is lifted high; the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!’” We saw that v14 was a quote from Moses’ song, when God delivered Israel from the prison cell of Egypt, through the Red Sea, into a wide and free place. ¹³“I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. ¹⁴*The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.*”

When the Lord becomes your salvation, He makes you righteous. You are declared to be legally right with God. He holds nothing against you; indeed he *has nothing* to hold against you! The word “guilty” can no longer apply to you. You may feel very often like that statement is true. But sorry, you are going to have to find a different word to use instead of “guilty,” if you want to proclaim what He has done. The Lord’s right hand has shattered the enemy... namely, your guilt.

When the Lord becomes your salvation, that means his mercy has triumphed over judgment. ^{Ja2.13} But since God is just, he could not forego judging your sins; your guilt had to obtain what it deserves: eternal death and misery. God had covenanted with his own Son, that you should be pardoned—washed clean of all your guilt—so that you might be presented to his Son as his pure and spotless bride. In that same covenant, the Son willingly accepted the task of bearing your guilt and all it deserved. Namely, on the cross and in the grave, he bore your eternal death and misery.

Furthermore, when the Lord becomes your salvation, God becomes satisfied with all the unabridged and heartily willing obedience of his Son, as it covers you like a pure white garment. Do you see that the Lord makes his face shine upon you and is gracious to you? Dare you to feel the warm and affectionate countenance that he lifts up upon you? Will you enjoy the euphoria of peace that he has shed abroad to you?

In all this, do you find the inclinations of your flesh and the suggestions of your mind toward sin, to be more and more despicable, despised, hated? Do you find that your iniquities—your flesh’s disposition to sin—prevail *against* you rather than *with* you? Is there war in your members, where there was once a wicked conspiracy and agreement in sin?

If so, then join with the psalmist in his shouts of joy and victory! The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things! What mightier thing is there, than to destroy the greatest power arrayed against you? If God is for you, who can be against you? Jesus Christ has nailed your guilt and your death to his cross. He has made a mockery of principalities and powers that once held you in their grip. All the accusations of your former owner Satan fall short, before Christ who is now your advocate.

What mightier thing, than for the Son to bear all your curse, to obey all the law even while under the load of your curse, to satisfy God’s justice for your rebellion, to fulfill all the prophecies of old, and to restore the glory and honor of God while restoring God’s image in you? What mightier thing is there, than for the Son to rise up from the dead, utterly decimating any claim of death over himself and all whom he has united to himself?

Has the Lord’s right hand not done mighty things? Multiply this, if you will, by the sum of souls, countless as the sand and stars, now made citizens in the Kingdom of the Son! Aye! The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!

Is this not a cause for joy inexpressible? Is there *anything* in your life over which these mighty things cannot and do not prevail? Will you honor God and enjoy him by pondering these mighty things, these wonders, which He has caused you to remember? There is joy for the righteous, so have joy.

III. Purpose for the Righteous (17-21)

That brings us, second, to *purpose for the righteous*. ¹⁷I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. ¹⁸The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. ¹⁹Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. ²⁰This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. ²¹I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.”

Few questions beleaguer the Christian so much as, “What is my purpose now; what am I to live for, and how am I to live for it?” The question foils us because we subtly switch the question, and like a train, we start heading down the wrong track. We switch the question to “What should I *do* now? What vocation should I pursue? What mighty thing should I set my own right hand to now?” We get so caught up on that track that we lose all orientation and all sight of the right track.

The psalmist very calmly and determinedly fixes upon the right track when he says, ¹⁷“I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.” As elsewhere, ^{Ps73.28}“But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.” Have you been checking the switches on the track? Have you been keeping watch to make sure you remain on the track that has one purpose? Are you living near God and telling of his deeds, proclaiming all he has done?

We might paraphrase the psalmist by saying, “You have life, so *have* life; you have a proclamation of what the Lord has done, so *proclaim* what the Lord has done.” If this is the track you are on, you will find that what job you contract yourself to, or what school you attend, or what neighborhood you live in, or what health care plan you subscribe, or what politician you support, does not become overly important.

This is why the Lord may chasten us severely: so that we might enjoy being on the right track, or coming back to it if somewhere along the line we have thrown the switch. Far from giving us over to death, he keeps us near him in life. Thus the Proverb, ^{Pr19.18}“Chasten your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.” For, ^{Ps94.12}“Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law.” The purpose of the Law for believers is to help them be near him, as a child who loves his parents feels nearer to them when affectionately obeying them.

The “gates of Righteousness” are the gates through which Christ and his people he makes righteous enter. ^{Is35.8}“And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.” ^{Ps24.7}“Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.”

Yes, Christ himself is the gate of righteousness. ^{Jn10.9}“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” ^{14.6}“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ^{Eph2.18}“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

How can you tell if you are on the track of purpose? One way might be to listen to what you tell people when they come to you with complaints, fears, or other needs. Do they really need the right health care plan? Do they really need the right President? Do they really need the right vision for their program or their future? Or do they really need Christ? How do you answer? How do you answer when *you* raise your complaints, fears, needs? Do you remind yourself that what you really need is Christ? Can the other things wait, or is it always Christ that waits?

This afternoon the Lord is pleased to provide you a perfect opportunity to practice. What will you make the focus of your conversation during the hymnsing and cookout? Will it be the mighty things the Lord has done? Or will it be the mighty things your baseball team has or has not done? Let’s find out this afternoon, who can wait. What will you lose, if you miss the game today? What will you lose, if you miss Christ? What will you gain, if you watch the game today? What will you gain, if you gain Christ?

IV. Foundation for the Righteous (22-24)

The third need fulfilled here is the *Foundation for the Righteous*. ²²“The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone; ²³the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” This splendid image gripped the NT apostles in its vivid exultation.

You’ll notice I replaced the NIV’s “capstone” with “chief cornerstone,” as in all other English translations. Grammatically, it is possible to translate the word as “capstone” as in the keystone placed last atop the gateway arch. Contextually, it is not possible. Here is the image. First the architect designs the location and shape of the building on the piece of land. The walls are going to be made of stones fitting tightly together. The foundation is made of extra large, rectangular stones.

The first stone laid down, is set very, very precisely in place at the primary corner. The orientation of that stone determines in which direction the other foundation stones will lie. And

since all the stones in the walls will be laid atop the foundation stones, this chief cornerstone determines the shape, strength, and orientation of the entire building.

What good is the most dazzlingly beautiful, intricate, ornate, and strong keystone, if the whole building crumbles and collapses? Any building not built upon Christ will not be oriented to his righteousness, and it will collapse.

No, the building that does not rest entirely upon Christ must be torn down. A new building must be built, with Christ as the chief cornerstone. Jesus told the Jewish authorities that they were like the tenants who killed the servants and son of the vineyard owner. They planned to inherit the kingdom by their own schemes of righteousness.^{Lk20.9f} When they mocked his warning,¹⁷ “Jesus looked directly at them and asked, ‘Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’? ¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

Peter spoke of the Church built upon Christ, quoting Isaiah and this psalm.^{1Pe2.6} “For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ ⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’”^{cfAct4.11} And Paul tells the Church,^{Eph2.19} “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”

The Lord tears down, and the Lord rebuilds... upon himself. And it is marvelous in our eyes. He has demolished all plans wherein the temple of God’s glory is built upon the architecture and construction of man’s mind and hands.^{1Co2.9} “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”—¹⁰but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”

All our righteousness, all our peace with God, comes from Him. He alone is the rock upon which the Kingdom is built. Let yourself fall on that stone. If you think you have to “do your part” by adding anything to what he has done, then you, too, are rejecting the cornerstone. Let your self-righteousness be broken to pieces. Let your excuses and your fears of being found out be broken. Let your addiction to consuming other empty satisfactions be broken. The Lord’s right hand will do these mighty things, so that you might live and proclaim what he has done.

V. Place for the Righteous (25-29)

We have joy, we have purpose, and we have a foundation. We have, fourth, a *Place for the Righteous*. What is this place? It is a place in His body. It is a place of salvation, of success, of blessing. It is a place in his light. In this place we can say, “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”^{Ps27.1}

In this place, we gladly give up our pretending to have it all together. Instead, we give thanks and exalt the Lord for having it all together *for* us. In this place, we gladly lay down the great things we have done. We not only rest content in the great things *he* has done, but we advertise them to other people as well!

In this place, we happily lay down the expectations we place upon other people to make us happy, and we lay down our dislike of them when they don’t. Rather, we join delightedly with them in the festal procession to worship God and give him thanks, for he has done abundantly far more than we think or imagine.

In this place, we speak to God because we have a Mediator who always gives us free and direct access to God. He bought us with his own blood. We speak to God and say, ²⁸“You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.” Is that what you do when you come into *this* place on the Lord’s Day? Do you come expecting to hear from Him? Do you come expecting Him to hear you?

In this place, we are free to give to God and give to others. I’m not just talking about the collection. I’m talking about giving yourself. I’m talking about giving your attention and interest to others, instead of just consuming their attention and interest in you. I’m talking about giving your joy in Christ’s love to others, instead of just thinking about whether they are feeding Christ’s love to you. I’m talking about expressing to others your thanks to the Lord for he is good, instead of just expecting others to express their thanks to you. I’m talking about initiating conversation with others, instead of just waiting for them to show interest in you.

You see, in this place, God leaves no room for addiction. No room for addiction to attention, to the game, or to alcohol. No room for addiction to pornography—including SI, Hanes catalogues, and vacuous romance novels. Addiction consumes you with consuming, so you have no room for *giving*. The place Christ has given to us is a place of *giving*. Giving that pleases the Lord can only arise from a heart that has been filled with Christ giving himself to you.

If Christ has given himself to you, then he has broken your need to consume at others’ expense. You are free to give at your expense. Christ has given his body and his blood, to give you joy, purpose, and foundation. Will you receive the place he would prepare for you? Will you receive a place among living stones who give as they have received? You simply do not need to worry about running out. You see, this is a place of giving, a place where your greatest joy comes as you ²⁹“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”