

Ps. 118, an Easter Psalm
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Consider first the *settings* in which the Psalm was used, then the *NT citations* showing it to be Messianic, and finally *read it through the eyes of Christ* to appreciate his sacrifice and the victory of his resurrection.

A. Settings

1. Written probably for Neh's feast of tabernacles after rebuilding of temple and wall, Neh. 8.
 - a) 1-4, Call to praise the Lord
 - b) 5-18, the people come to the temple, recalling God's faithful deliverance of them and instruction of them through suffering.
 - c) 19-28, the priests welcome the people into the temple for the thanksgiving sacrifice.
 - d) 29, Concluding call to praise.
2. v. 25 sung at feast of tabernacles every year. It is in response to this plea for salvation that Christ announces the Living Water in John 7:37-38.
3. Sung at end of Passover supper. May be the "hymn" of Matt. 26:30. The Lord would have had its verses ringing in his ears as he approached Calvary.

B. NT Citations

NT use of several of the verses shows that the Psalm is Messianic. Only Pss. 2, 22, 69, 89, 110 are quoted more often in the NT.

1. 22-23: The Stone
 - a) Christ claims this verse as descriptive of himself in the context of the parable of the vineyard. Specifically, the rejection of the stone is the killing of the heir by the wicked husbandmen. Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17
 - b) Acts 4:11 sets the rejection and establishment of the stone parallel to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection in v.10.
 - c) 1 Pet. 2:4,7: the summary passage dealing with Christ as three distinct stones foretold in the OT:
 - 1) The Foundation Stone, Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:4-6
 - 2) The chief corner stone, Ps. 118:22; Synoptics; 1 Pet. 2:7
 - 3) The destroying stone, Isa. 8:14, Synoptics, 1 Pet. 2:8.
2. 25-26: The Festal greeting of the people on Palm Sunday.
 - a) The people's greeting: Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9,10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13. All but Luke include "Hosanna" from v.25 as well as "Blessed is he that cometh..." from v.26.

- b) The Lord's prophecy of a greeting yet to come: Matt. 23:39; Luke 13:35 (Does Matt quote Luke, as Guthrie; or does Luke quote Matthew, as A.B. Bruce, Hendriksen?) Note that the Lord does not foretell another "Hosanna," but only "Blessed...."

C. The Psalm

With this background in mind, let us read through the Psalm as descriptive of Christ. He has just sung it before going out to Gethsemane; by placing him in the place of the one who speaks throughout the Psalm, we can trace something of his mind in the hours before the crucifixion.

1. 1-4, 5, Introductory and Concluding Call to Praise.

- a) Who praises? Note the progression:

- 1) "Israel", God's people.
- 2) "House of Aaron," priests, reminding us of the worship we owe.
- 3) "them that fear the Lord," reminding us of the attitude we should constantly have toward him.

- b) Why praise?

The dominant characteristic of God for which this Psalm urges us to praise him is his "mercy," ~~xesed~~, faithfulness to covenant. The Psalmist (in fulfillment, Christ) urges us to praise the Father with him for his trustworthiness.

2. 5-18, Description of past deliverance

Throughout this section, the speaker is always singular, and the Lord is always spoken of in the third person. The section sets forth two perspectives on past trouble.

- a) First perspective: trouble as persecution from the wicked.

- 1) 5, Introductory Summary:

I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.

- 2) 6-9, The speaker and the Lord are bound to one another. He chooses us in his elective love; we, by faith, choose him.

- a> 6,7, The Lord is on my side in the conflict, and the enemy is on the other side. Emphasizes how God chooses us.

- b> 8,9, I will trust in the Lord, not in others. Reflects our need to choose God. The reference to "princes" in v.9 reminds us of the perversion of justice in the treatment our Lord received from civil magistrates and priests alike, both of whom have their authority only from God.

- 3) 10-12, The Battle.

- a> The enemy is identified as "all nations." Cf. Ps. 2:2, cited in Acts 4:26,27 as fulfilled in the crucifixion.

Christ suffered at the hands of all nations, that he might be the savior, not of the Jews only, but of Jew and Gentile alike.

- b> The victory, mentioned three times, is "I will destroy them," literally, "I will cause them to be circumcised." Many commentators take this to mean simply "cut down," but in fulfillment we can see the literal sense coming through. His victory over them is to bring those who were formerly rebels into fellowship with himself.

4) 13-16, celebration after the Victory. Three elements:

- a> 13, *glorying* over the vanquished. Speaking to the enemy, the speaker recalls the malicious intent and the Lord's deliverance. We think of this as being a "poor sport," but this is not a friendly football game. It is a life and death struggle. Cf. Ps. 2, "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision."

- b> 14-15a, *rejoicing* among the victorious.

- c> 15b,16, *praise* for the Lord's action, represented metaphorically by his Right Hand (which most people use for action).

- b) 17-18, Second Perspective: trouble as chastening from the Lord. There is no reference to the adversary here. Instead, in declaring the works of the Lord, the speaker announces that the suffering has been chastisement from the Lord. The noun from this verbal root is used in Isa. 53:5, "the chastisement of our peace was upon him." He bears our sins, and thus receives the punishment that is due them.

The verses are chiastic. In the center, 17b-18a, the works of the Lord are chastisement. At the outside, 17a, 18b, Death is not to be his final lot in this struggle, pointing to the theme of resurrection.

- c) Thus 5-18 graphically depict our Lord's suffering from two perspectives: as a hateful attack of sinful men from which the Father delivers him, and as God's chastisement on him for our sin.

3. 19-28 Praise in the Temple

Now the speaker alternates between singular and plural. The singular speaker (*) addresses the Lord in the second person, while the plural speakers speak of him only in third person. Three interchanges, moving out from the speaker himself to his people, and finally closing with praise to God.

- a) 19-20, The Savior's credentials: perfect righteousness.

- 1) 19, he requests access to the temple in order to praise God,

acknowledging that the gates through which he must pass are "gates of righteousness."

- 2) 20, perhaps in the mouth of the people: anyone who can pass this way must indeed be righteous.
- 3) So our Savior, though tempted in all points as we are, yet is without sin.

b) 21-24, His Personal Experience

- 1) 21, the speaker praises God for hearing and saving him. As we saw at the end of the last section, this is in the form of deliverance from death.
- 2) 22-24, the people's response.
 - a> 22, the rejected and restored stone is (as we have seen) in the NT symbolic of the smitten and risen Lord Jesus.
 - b> 23, they acknowledge the Lord's agency in this deliverance.
 - c> 24, they proclaim the day a day of glad rejoicing. NB: Not just any day, but this day of resurrection!

c) 25-27, His Blessing to his People

- 1) 25. Since it addresses the Lord, for consistency with the rest of the Psalm, must be in the mouth of the Savior. The picture here is the Lord Jesus interceding for us with the Father on the merit of his sacrifice. Man can ask for salvation, but there are many who have prayed this prayer who are not saved. Asking for salvation is not the same as saving faith.
- 2) 26-27. Here is the people's expression of faith.
 - a> They recognize him as God's emissary.
 - b> They know that they are in the house of the Lord.
 - c> They acknowledge God as the one who has lightened them.
 - d> They eagerly offer the festal sacrifice of thanksgiving (*hag*).

d) 28, His final thanksgiving to God. The Savior's thanksgiving to his Father for deliverance from the grave.

e) Summary: the dynamic of salvation is first of all the Savior's sinlessness, then his own victory over death, then his intercession for us and our faith in him, and finally us joining him in thanksgiving to God for raising Christ from the dead and thus giving us life and hope.