**Psalm 118 v 1,2; 19-29**

This psalm was written either to celebrate the victory of a Davidic king or for a march into Jerusalem on a Jewish feast day. In the first case the speaker is the king himself and in the second it is the priestly worship leader. Let us study the first two verses as an introduction.

**1**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
    His faithful love endures forever.

**2**Let all Israel repeat:
   “His faithful love endures forever.” *New Living Translation*

This could have referred to either the deliverance from slavery in Egypt (way back in the past) or the dedication of Solomon’s temple or the return from exile. But which past event was meant, what it says is still true today, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13 v 8)’ – and so is God’s love. The psalm goes on to repeat ‘His faithful love endures forever’ twice more – in case you missed it the first time! We have been living through a strange and unsettling time with lockdowns and the pandemic but I hope we have all experienced that God is there just the same.

Today is Palm Sunday – the day when we remember Jesus’s entry on a donkey into Jerusalem at the start of his final week. (As an aside – this was a very young donkey that had never been ridden before. Martin Smith told me this was a very good example of Jesus’s ability to relate to animals as Jesus was able to ride the donkey immediately and it was not disturbed by a large, shouting crowd. It would have been a good example for our studies on animals in the Bible.)

 This processional psalm must have been in people’s minds as they cheered his arrival. The people had a great expectation that God was going to send his Messiah (or anointed one) as a king to rescue them and restore a mighty kingdom that would last forever. The prophets had spoken much about what this new kingdom would be like but it was really two messages in one. First the kingdom would be established on the present earth by the arriving Messiah but then there would be a second arrival – this time to completely transform the present earth and combine it with a new heaven in a dramatic way.

Jesus knew that the people had somewhat misunderstood the prophets’ message and expected both arrivals at the same time. He tried to counter this by not claiming directly to just be the Messiah. He did call himself the Son of Man and this is a title that only refers once in the whole OT to a Messianic figure. The Messiah was very much portrayed as a human figure – a great king but definitely human. The OT prophecies did not equate the Messiah to Yahweh but the other divine name ‘el’ and the ‘son of man’ does not obviously refer to Yahweh. Even today some people regard being called a ‘son’ implies Jesus was in some way inferior to God and an early branch of Christianity called Arianism thought that. Many groups today such as Unitarians, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and also Moslems regard Jesus in this way. Many people on the fringes of Christianity probably think similarly. This view can lead on to the commonly held idea that Jesus was just a good man misunderstood by some of his more enthusiastic followers. The disciples by Pentecost had grasped the truth and we can read in Peter’s sermon that he proclaimed Jesus was both part of the Godhead (Lord) and the Messiah (Christ). He quoted Psalm 110 v 1

 The LORD said to my Lord,
    “Sit in the place of honour at my right handuntil I humble your enemies,
    making them a footstool under your feet.”

This is a very significant, prophetic verse. It equates in status both Yahweh (LORD) and the Messiah (David’s Lord) as that is what sitting at the right hand implies.

The title Jesus chose for himself was ‘Son of Man’. It occurs only once in the OT referring to a divine figure but Jesus applied it to himself around seventy times in the gospels. What should it have meant to those listening to him? We need to look at the Book of Enoch. This a Jewish writing that many regarded as inspired and was written around the first and second centuries BC. It is quoted by Jude in his epistle in the NT. In the book ‘Son of Man’ occurs 17 times. He is described as a divine character, very much equal to God sent to earth by Him to establish this new rule. The picture is very much that we have of Jesus at his second coming bringing in the new heaven and the new earth. He is also called the Chosen (or anointed) One the Messiah and the Righteous One. This foretelling was so accurate that the Jews, after Jesus had come and called himself the Son of Man, ceased to revere the Book of Enoch and it was almost forgotten with no complete copies remaining. It only survived in the church in Ethiopia. (Maybe the Ethiopian eunuch took back a copy along with the scroll of Isaiah!). An explorer called James Bruce brought back three copies of it in 1773 and our complete knowledge of it only comes from these.

If we move on to verses 19 to 21, we could imagine ourselves there at the gate of Jerusalem and Jesus saying this as he enters.

**19**Open for me the gates where the righteous enter,
    and I will go in and thank the Lord.
**20**These gates lead to the presence of the Lord,
    and the godly enter there.
**21**I thank you for answering my prayer
    and giving me victory!

I can’t help thinking of Easter Journey, as many of you will have seen it performed at the church. The children open up lining the imagined highway like a crowd and cheer as they picture Jesus coming into the hall as if the doors were the gates of Jerusalem.

After acting the cleansing of the temple, the children then go on into the lounge where they hear the parable of the tenants in the vineyard. The tenants who refused to give the absent landlord his crops and beat those who the landlord sent to claim the crops and finally murdered his son. The story teller finishes by quoting the next verse of this psalm and says how Jesus also quoted it and applied it to himself.

**22**The stone that the builders rejected

  has now become the cornerstone.

The stone became the cornerstone – that is the first stone of the building that keeps the two joining walls at true right-angles and also defines the vertical direction. This is just how Jesus shows the true law on which to base our lives and makes the building he is supervising perfect. But some translations say capstone or keystone instead of cornerstone – the Greek can mean either. The capstone is the shaped stone at the top of an arch which is critical to holding the two sides in place. Without it the arch would fall down. It is the last stone to be put in place before the temporary scaffolding which was holding the stones up can be removed. I thought of the scaffolding being like the OT law which was necessary until Jesus as the capstone was put in place. Then the more perfect law was free standing and available for all to see.

**23**This is the Lord’s doing,
    and it is wonderful to see.
**24**This is the day the Lord has made.
    We will rejoice and be glad in it.

These next two verses remind me of a chorus we often used to sing. It was a chorus which helped introduce lively worship into the fairly staid 1960s and 70s. We started to sing it at our church in Dumfries in which the worship was pretty formal. I remember the first time somebody did a ‘hey’ at the end of one of the repeats of the chorus. Now that the ice was broken, we all sang plenty of ‘heys’ after that. All our worship was enlivened.

**25**Please, Lord, please save us.
    Please, Lord, please give us success.
**26**Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

 We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The next two verses must have prompted what the crowd shouted as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. They shouted ‘hosannah’ which means ‘save us!’ and ‘blessed is the king who comes in the name of the LORD’. They added the word ‘king’ as they saw Jesus as an earthly king, certainly not God himself. The Jews could see their coming saviour as either a superhuman king or God himself but not as both united together and they certainly did not associate the prophesied suffering servant with him.

**27**The Lord is God, shining upon us.
    Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.

In this verse we see hidden a prophecy of what was to come. Jesus would be the suffering servant, sacrificed on the cross to save the people. He was nailed to the cross, not bound with cords but he bound himself with love for us and obedience to his Father. As he said at his arrest in the garden, ‘Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more then twelve legions of angels?’ He was on the cross voluntarily. You may notice verse 27 is translated differently in the NIV. Some commentators have questioned if a sacrifice would actually be tied to the altar – but Isaac was bound with cords to the altar by his father, Abraham in an action which prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus.

**28**You are my God, and I will praise you!
    You are my God, and I will exalt you!

**29**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
    His faithful love endures forever.

The psalm finishes on a note of praise to God and ends by repeating the opening verse. The crowd were later disappointed that Jesus did not bring in the kingdom they had long expected. Maybe they should have thought more of the promise of that last verse. God’s love for them was for ever and the kingdom had been established. Only its fulfilment was going to take a long time and depended on those of them who would still trust him and accept what Jesus had done. We should also continue to trust that the LORD is faithful and will see us through difficult times to the glorious end – giving us plenty of opportunities to cheer and praise Him on the way.

To end I will leave up these few verses which summarise everything we have been thinking about.

**5**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

**6**Though he was God,
    he did not think of equality with God
    as something to cling to.
**7**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
    he took the humble position of a slave
    and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
**8**    he humbled himself in obedience to God
    and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

**9**Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour
    and gave him the name above all other names,
**10**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
**11**and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
    to the glory of God the Father. *Phil 2 v 5 - 11*