

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Soundtrack

“Blessed and Rejected”

Psalm 118

Rev. Mike Fordham

In the 2nd church that I served we went on a mission trip of adults and youth to Nicaragua. The youth learned a number of pantomime skits that we would use help to communicate the good news of Jesus without words. One popular skit we used was the chair skit. We would set up a chair for the skit with a sign on it that said in Spanish, “No toques! Pecado!” which means, “Do not touch! Sin!” At this one place our youth pastor was the lead actor in the skit. He walked up to the chair, picked up the sign that said, “No toques! Pecado!” “Do not touch! Sin!” He then laughed and set it aside and the roared laughing as well, much more than they normally did. He then looked at the chair very closely and eventually as we all tend to do, he gave into the temptation and reached out and touched the chair. When he did, he then discovered that his hand was stuck to the chair. As the skit advanced, he tried everything possible to let go of the chair but only ended getting hilariously even more entangled in the chair. The crowd was loving it and laughed much more than normal. It was a hit! Eventually one of our youth came along and prayed for him and slowly but surely through God’s love he was set free from the chair or sin and walked off celebrating. The people loved the skit and were cracking up with laughter almost the entire time but also were looking at each other kind of confused as well. I discovered why at the end of the skit through our interpreter who told me that we spelled the word for sin wrong. Instead of “pecado” we had accidentally spelled it wrong by adding an “s” which made the word, “pescado,” which no longer means sin but now means fish. The whole time we thought we were telling people to stay away from sin and that only God could set them free from sin. Instead, we were telling them to stay away from fish and only God could set them free from fish. We meant well but when we thought we were communicating one thing the people listening clearly understood something different. Life is full of misunderstandings. Most are not that big of a deal and may even be humorous, whereas other misunderstandings have the potential to lead to major conflict.

On that first Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey He was sending the people a message that they clearly did not understand as at first they welcomed Jesus into town as Hero King coming to save them, but the week ended with them rejecting Him as the Hated Savior. Interestingly, Psalm 118 points out this truth to us in a manner that if we are not careful we would miss the meaning and also misunderstood the truth it is meant to bring us. Let us listen carefully to God’s Word as found in *Psalm 118*.

Psalm 118

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

- ² Let all Israel repeat:
 "His faithful love endures forever."
- ³ Let Aaron's descendants, the priests, repeat:
 "His faithful love endures forever."
- ⁴ Let all who fear the LORD repeat:
 "His faithful love endures forever."
- ⁵ In my distress I prayed to the LORD,
 and the LORD answered me and set me free.
- ⁶ The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear.
 What can mere people do to me?
- ⁷ Yes, the LORD is for me; he will help me.
 I will look in triumph at those who hate me.
- ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
 than to trust in people.
- ⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
 than to trust in princes.
- ¹⁰ Though hostile nations surrounded me,
 I destroyed them all with the authority of the LORD.
- ¹¹ Yes, they surrounded and attacked me,
 but I destroyed them all with the authority of the LORD.
- ¹² They swarmed around me like bees;
 they blazed against me like a crackling fire.
 But I destroyed them all with the authority of the LORD.
- ¹³ My enemies did their best to kill me,
 but the LORD rescued me.
- ¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my song;
 he has given me victory.
- ¹⁵ Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.
 The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!
- ¹⁶ The strong right arm of the LORD is raised in triumph.
 The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!
- ¹⁷ I will not die; instead, I will live
 to tell what the LORD has done.
- ¹⁸ The LORD has punished me severely,
 but he did not let me die.
- 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!
- ²² The stone that the builders rejected
 has now become the cornerstone.
- 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.*
- 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.
- ²⁷ *The LORD is God, shining upon us.*
Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.
- 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.

HEROIC VICTORIOUS KING

In carefully reading this Psalm we learn that it was written from the perspective of someone who may be coming back from a battle, maybe even a King returning home after winning a battle and as he is approaching the city there is an air of great excitement and celebration over the victory over the various enemies. The writer says that hostile forces surrounded him like angry swarming bees and attacked him with the ferocity of a blazing fire and yet through God they won the battle. The Psalmist then lifts up great praise and thanksgiving to God for his miraculous deliverance from sure death in the battle. This is a Psalm of great thanksgiving and praise to God for miraculously winning the battle. The Psalmist says something interesting in *verse 14* that we can miss the importance of if we are not careful. He says, *"The LORD is my strength and my song; he has given me victory."* This is a literal quote from the song of the Israelites that they sung to God in *Exodus 15:2* after they miraculously made it through the Red Sea and God then drowned all of Pharaoh's army thus giving the Israelite slaves a most miraculous victory. In quoting this the Psalmist says this is the same kind of victory God has given him. This Psalm gets even more interesting in *verse 25* when the writer cries to God using a Hebrew word that is only used 1 time in the Old Testament and it is the word, *hoshiya na*. In Greek and English it is transliterated literally as *Hosanna!* Hosanna has 2 basic meanings: 1st it is a cry for help, a cry to be saved from whatever danger they may be facing; 2nd, it can also be a cry of hope and exultation as if to say, "Yes, our deliverance and salvation has come!" The people of *Psalm 118* may have been crying out those words as the King was coming home victorious in battle. As the King is coming home with his soldiers victorious in battle they come back as heroes hearing the cries of celebration, praise, and thanksgiving as the people say, "Hosanna, our salvation has come!"

It is fascinating that this Psalm eventually became one of the Great Egyptian Hallel Psalms, which were especially sung by the people during Israel's 3 main religious festivals of Pentecost, Tabernacles, and Passover. The people would sing this and the other Hallel psalms of praise and thanksgiving as they approached Jerusalem and during their times of worship in the Temple and in their homes during Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost. They were still carrying on this tradition of singing *Psalm 118* when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a peaceful donkey like a mighty king returning home victorious from battle during the Passover. As Jesus was riding into Jerusalem the people understood Jesus as being their Savior King riding into town to save them

and they could not help but reach back to this Psalm and quote the Hosanna cry celebrating that God has sent their Mighty, King to save them. They just had to cry out to God with great celebration! Have you ever noticed that there are just some songs that are just so good that it is hard not to sing along with them when they come on in the car? That was the case for Montreal native Taoufik Moalla when the 1990 hit song that has the lyrics in it, *“Everybody Dance Now”* came on while he was driving. Moalla began to sing along (presumably with extra enthusiasm), but quickly noticed police lights behind him. He later told reporters, “I was thinking they wanted to pass, but they called on the speaker, ‘Please go to the right side!’ I stopped and 4 police came, 2 on each side, and checked the inside of the car. Then they asked me if I screamed. I said, ‘No, I was just singing.’” Montreal has varying bylaws depending on the neighborhood, but police apparently felt that this case fell under the category of “Noise resulting from cries, clamors, singing, altercations or cursing and any other form of uproar” prohibited in that part of the city. It earned the poor 38-year-old father of 2 a \$118 ticket. He later said, “I don't know if my voice was very bad and that's why I got the ticket, but I was very shocked.” [An NPR article](#) recounting the story concluded with an amused question for the Montreal police: “How do you not sing to this song?” *When the crowds saw Jesus riding into town on the donkey just like the prophecy states they just could not help by cry out with hopeful celebration, “Hosanna! Yes, we are going to be saved!”*

HATED SUFFERING SAVIOR

The people were right to lift up their cry to God to be saved as well as to cry out praise to God for their salvation that was just around the corner, but there was clearly a miscommunication happening here. They expected a powerful, mighty, political, military king of king to lead them into battle against the Roman government and set them free from the Romans oppressive rule over them just like God set the Israelites free from Egyptian slavery in Exodus. Jesus was coming as their all-powerful King and Savior to set them free from horrific oppression but not political oppression, instead from the tyrannical rule of sin over their lives and to bring them back into a right relationship with God. Also, they did not understand the way that Jesus would bring about their salvation. It would not be through a military battle that God would bring them victory. Instead, the psalmist points to how it would happen in *verse 22* where he uses the analogy of a stone that the builders rejected. Jesus later says in several places that He is the stone that the builders rejected. The builders were the religious rulers who eventually rejected Jesus, had him tortured, and even killed on the cross. Possibly the same people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as the victorious heroic king with cries of “hosanna,” later in the week changed their message by crying out instead “crucify Him.”

Jesus went from being the long-awaited hero to the hated and rejected Savior. CBS News reported back in October 2011 that In the 1960s, towns along the northeast coast of Japan began erecting seawalls to withstand waves of about 30 feet, which was the height of a terrible tsunami that struck in 1933. The walls were an eyesore everywhere, but they were especially disliked in the village of Fudai. Kotoko Wamura was the mayor of Fudai when the town began planning its seawall. Wamura had been a young man when the 1933 tsunami wiped out his hometown. Wamura also remembered the stories of an even larger 50-foot tsunami that had struck in 1896. On one side of the city, the mayor built a huge flood gate where the Fudai river meets the coast. And on

the other side, he constructed a tower seawall at a height of 51 feet, the tallest seawall on the NE coast. Residents who lived in the shadow of the wall were furious, unconvinced they needed a wall so expensive and so ugly, blocking their ocean view. But Wamura would not back down. Opinions about the mayor and the wall changed on Friday March 11, 2011, when a tsunami, described by one resident as “a black wave, darker than a nightmare” struck Japan. Towns up and down the coast were wiped out, but not Fudai. The wall, once derided and despised, held back an ocean of death and destruction. One resident, Ms. Odow, owns a home right behind the seawall. Recognizing that the project was initially hated by the residents, a reporter asked what the residents thought of the mayor now. She responded, “They appreciate the mayor now ... [he is] the hero of Fudai.” The people wanted Jesus to save them but eventually their hope turned to hatred that led to Jesus’ death. Yet, in the end we now realize that Jesus became our hero.

We now know that God used their rejection to ironically bring their salvation and deliverance from sin. The psalmist points to this in *verse 27* saying, “*The LORD is God, shining upon us. Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.*” When Jesus was rejected, He became the final perfect, sacrificial lamb that was to be bound to the altar for the sins of the people. Through the peoples’ hatred, rejection, and death, the cross became a kind of altar upon which King Jesus was sacrificed for our sins. Most kingdoms do anything they can to protect their king. This is the unspoken premise of the game of chess, for example. When the king falls, the kingdom is lost. Therefore, the king must be protected at all costs. Another notable example comes from the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperately wanted to join the expeditionary forces and watch the invasion from the bridge of a battleship in the English Channel. U.S. General Dwight David Eisenhower was desperate to stop him, for fear that the Prime Minister might be killed in battle. When it became apparent that Churchill would not be dissuaded, Eisenhower appealed to a higher authority: King George VI. The king went and told Churchill that if it were the Prime Minister's duty to witness the invasion, he could only conclude that it was also his own duty as king to join him on the battleship. At this point Churchill reluctantly agreed to back down, for he knew that he could never expose the King of England to such danger. King Jesus did exactly the opposite. With royal courage he surrendered his body to be crucified. On the cross he offered a king's ransom: his life for the life of his people. He would die for all the wrong things that we had ever done and would do, completely atoning for all our sins. The crown of thorns that was meant to make a mockery of his royal claims and the sign posted above Jesus’ head on the cross that read, “King of the Jews”, actually proclaimed his kingly dignity, even in death as our hero King. Jesus who was the rejected stone then became the chief cornerstone of the building that God was erecting. God took advantage of the rejection and hatred of those He loved to bring us God’s love and the opportunity for our lives to be made right with God. When Jesus and the disciples were finished with their last supper together the Bible tells us that they sang a song before they went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Some believe it may have been Psalm 118 that they sang calling on God’s salvation and little did the disciples know how God would indeed save them through Jesus. Jesus did all of this for you and for me. Jesus did this for us to make a way for us to experience God’s unconditional love, forgiveness, a new life in Christ, and that we might

become children of God in a relationship with God Himself! So today, we join the people of God from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the people of God from all time and cry out to God, "Hosanna, Save Us from this dark broken world, save us from our own brokenness, save us from sin and death."

For those of us who are followers of Jesus who have experienced God's love through Jesus, we now cry out with all of God's people with thanksgiving, "Hosanna!" For those who have never asked God to forgive them, save them from their sins, I invite you to cry out to Jesus to save you from your sins and God will accept you as you are, forgive you, and make you a child of God.

I pray these words as our benediction over us from *Ephesians 3:16-19*, "*I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷ Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. ¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*"

Icebreaker I – Have you ever been in a situation where your message was "lost in translation?" How did you handle the misunderstanding?

Icebreaker II – Have you ever felt like a "stone the builders rejected?" How did you handle it?

1. What clues can you find that this psalm describes the Feast of Tabernacles (vv.19-20, 27)?
2. What do these three groups represent (vv. 1-4)? What do they mean by "love?"
3. What has the Lord done for the psalmist (v.5)? Based on the attitude in verses 6-7, from what do you think he is free?
4. In verses 10-12, what does it mean to cut off the nations? Is this the psalmist's personal story, or the story of the whole people?
5. What do you make of verse 14? Is there a process being described, or simply two ways of saying the same thing?
6. What is the psalmist's mood about being chastised (vv.17-18)?
7. Do you feel part of a spiritual community that has gone through "chastening?" Or must you "go it alone" spiritually?
8. Who is the "us" in your "Lord, save us?"
9. Where do you need help right now? Joy? Victory? Success? What promise do you hold on to?
10. Read verse 24. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much are you rejoicing today? What is keeping you from rejoicing more?

11. Why does the psalmist call himself, “righteous (vv.19-20)? Why does he feel worthy to enter the “gates of righteousness?”
12. Who are the “builders” (v.22)? What “stone” do they reject? What is a capstone? Who did the New Testament writers see in this allegory (see Acts 4:8-11)?
13. “Hosana” is Hebrew for “O grant salvation.” Who do you think is “he who comes in the name of the Lord” (vv. 25-26)?
14. If you are willing to trust a plane or car to get you to your destination, are you willing to trust God to guide you here on earth and to your eternal destination? Do you trust Him more than any human being?
15. How can this group pray for you this week?