

Psalm 118 (selected verses)

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever...

¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous:

“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!

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

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

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

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

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

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

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;

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

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

²⁵ O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success.

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷ The 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.

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

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

Victory!

It wasn't supposed to be like this. There were supposed to be crowds of people congregating all around. There were supposed to be praise echoing down from the masses. Thunderous full-throated praise to be sung to the King. But instead, there was silence, odd, and eerie silence. The shuffling of feet, the wringing of hands. The great teacher had died, the friend of many had been beaten, disgraced, and crucified. Some had watched. Some had heard his words and had listened to his cries. And by now the rest had heard of his horrible death and how his body had been laid in a borrowed tomb. This is not how many envisioned how things would go. They thought he was the Christ.

After a day of rest, as the women came near to the tomb early on that first day of the week to care for the body of Jesus, they wondered how they would roll the stone away. But then the earth shook violently. The stone had been rolled away and an angel sat on it. And the tomb itself, well... it was empty. And so suddenly that confusing silence, that dreary night of worry and wonder and sadness, was pierced not just by the morning dawn but by the brilliant light of angels and the sound of a triumphant message. ***“Do not be afraid.”*** The

angel said to the women. *“I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you.”*

It was not as they had expected, it was better. Filled with that strange mixture of fear and joy. They rushed off to tell the others. And suddenly Jesus met them. He came to this small group and how thrilling it must have been to hear him say *“Greetings,”*. That women came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, *“Do not be afraid. God and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

It was not what they had expected, it was better. On Friday and Saturday, they had been reeling. Some had hoped for an earthly Messiah, their hopes had been dashed. All of their hearts had been broken at the death of their friend. Those women came to the tomb that morning expecting to anoint the dead body of a teacher they admired. Instead, their teacher, their Lord, their Savior had risen from the dead. More than a man to be admired, more than a teacher who came to earn earthly praise or fleeting fame or accumulate himself a loyal throng who would help him restore the nation to power and stature. He had come for a bigger purpose. He had come for a greater, more important victory. He had come to bring everlasting victory. He had come to bring into submission our enemies of sin, and hell, and death itself.

Maybe it wasn't the kind of victory many people were expecting or even hoping for, but oh, it was so much better. It was the victory that God had promised since the beginning. The Lord Jesus had gone about the grunt work of salvation. He fulfilled God's promises. He lived a life of perfection in our place resisting every temptation. He died as our sacrifice. He rested in the tomb as the one who gives us rest and rose to life to assure us of eternal salvation. It the quiet moments of that Holy Weekend the Lord Jesus fulfilled God's promise and brought to us new life.

Today may not be what we expected a few months ago. We looked ahead to find out when Easter was, we circled the date on the calendar and made plans that certainly didn't look like this. We who have grown accustomed to some wonderful traditions on our typical Easter gatherings looked forward to another chance to fill up the church with our presence and with hymns of praise. But today the buildings are empty. The churches are filled with a strange silence - only the sound of a few shuffling feet and hands that may or may not be wringing over how this is going to go. Hearts are mixed with anxiety, with sadness, with anger, frustration, and even fear, with all that is going on in the world around us.

But dear friends, the tomb is still empty! The strange circumstances that we find our world in today cannot change the facts of our faith. Jesus died and rose from the dead. He proclaimed, **“it is finished”** and our sins have been paid for in full. The resurrection assures that the Father is pleased with this payment for sin and Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be. Jesus died and rose again for you. He rose victorious. As the one who defeated sin and conquered the grave, he rose eternally to save. Oh, what sweet joy this sentence gives, - wherever it is sung or spoken by hearts that believe - I know that my Redeemer Lives.

When you strip Easter down to its simple message, this is really the foundation of our faith. Without the resurrection of Christ, we would be still in our sins, our faith would be

futile. But the tomb is empty, indeed! He lived, he died, and he rose again, so that we may live with him forever. And that message is powerful, and it cannot be silenced, and it is still better than anything we deserved or could imagine. The tomb is empty! And because he lives we too shall live. Because he lives, he is our solid foundation upon whom our whole life and our sure hope for the life to come is built upon. And he is the key to our life and our confidence that holds us up and holds us together even in difficult times. ***The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.*** And if God loves me that much to give his life for me, he will certainly care for me all my days.

And so with the Psalmist, we ***give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever.*** Yes, the Lord is my strength and our song, he has become our salvation. He has defeated death and the grave for us. He crushed our enemy Satan and he has granted us peace with God as he has forgiven all of our sins. The Lord's right hand stretched out to save and it has done mighty things. ***I will not die but live, and I will proclaim what the LORD has done.***

Christ is risen! This is the simple message that every year, and really every Sunday, leads to our grand celebrations. This truth brings forth jubilant praise from God's people. But just because we can't get together for some grand celebration this year, don't think for one bit that this lessens what our God has done. Instead consider how God has slowed the pace of life so that we can consider with unhurried attention, what our God has done for us. As you find yourself becoming frustrated and angry that you are missing out on many of the things you love about this time of year, take a moment to give thanks for the opportunity to rejoice in the simple truth of Easter, the tomb is empty, death and the grave have been defeated by Christ. As those who are prone to fill our days and especially our holidays with so much that we overlook what is truly important, let us pause and consider the simple message of Easter, the tomb is empty, our Redeemer lives. Dear friends, this is indeed ***the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.***

In the strange and baffling moments of that first Easter morning, he came near with his presence and with his word of peace, and Jesus changed gloom into exuberant joy. Now he comes to you in this strange time in history. As you celebrate Easter this year, you are sitting in your home and watching a guy talk to a camera as he sits in an empty church. Today, instead of your favorite pew you are perhaps in your favorite chair or a comfy spot in the living room. Instead of a good size crowd of believers, you may be gathered with just a few. And because of this, you may feel a bit down, a bit sad, maybe even a bit angry, or worried, or anxious, or even somehow defeated. But dear friends, I assure you, ***this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.*** This is not what we expected, but in these strange and baffling moments, the LORD Jesus still comes near with his word of peace, and make no mistake about it, the tomb is still empty. Victory is still ours. This is the day that Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Because whatever our circumstance, whatever frustrations we face, wherever we are, nothing can change the facts of Easter. Christ lived for you. He died in your place. Jesus rose again to give us his victory over sin, the power of Satan, and even over death itself!

Do not be afraid, Jesus and his angels declared on that first Easter morning and that message of comfort has been passed down through the ages. To those living under Roman

law, under threat of crucifixion, under the shadow and death and pain, Jesus brought them undying hope and peace and joy. Jesus came to conquer the grave for them and for all before and after them who had been terrorized by death's chilling touch. Jesus comes near to warm our hearts with the word of his victory over the grave so that those in this present age may be rescued and comforted and strengthened as well. As death terrifies so many in our world today, we can stand on his word of truth and be comforted and confident in the salvation that he won for us. *Because he lives, we too shall live.* This is the confidence Christ gives us now and always. This is the victory that he gives to us even if when it seems that we are hard-pressed and defeated. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good. His love endures forever.

The tomb is empty, *the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!* And now from tent to tent, from house to house, let shouts of joy and victory resound in the dwelling place of the righteous! This year our Easter praise fills up our living rooms instead of our churches. And so it is from a slightly different perspective that we see this same wonderful truth today, but God can use that for our good. Because even with a stripped-down Easter celebration, you cannot strip away the blessings that God has secured for us. The tomb is empty! Heaven is open! Your sins are forgiven, and death has been trampled on by your Savior, your mighty and victorious King! *The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live and will proclaim what the LORD has done.*

God willing, we will soon be back together worshipping our Lord together in his house with hearts filled with gratitude and appreciation. And yet remember, God has revealed that he has something even better planned for you. We wait not only for a time where we can join together in our houses of worship, but we wait with eager anticipation for a time is coming when he will bring us to his glorious courts in heaven. Where gathered together with all of his people we may praise him unendingly in the home prepared for us in the new heavens and the new earth. There we will praise him without restriction, without reservation; and doubt and fear will be no more. ***Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love endures forever!***

Add Psalm 118 to list of psalms that have lifted our spirits in this unexpected season. God comes near with his living and enduring word of promise and peace and victory. And so with the psalmist we proclaim, ***I will give you thanks for you answered me. You have become my salvation. I will not die but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. This is the day, the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!*** Alleluia! Amen.