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*Psalms Volume XI*

## **His Lovingkindness is Everlasting**

### **Psalm 118**

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My oldest daughter Ashley and I were in Chicago, and we went to one of our favorite places there—the Chicago Art Museum. And they were featuring the works of a French painter by the name of Georges Seurat. And when you come in to the area dedicated to his works, you go through a number of paintings that really aren't all that well known. Of course he's best known for his *Sunday Afternoon* painting, which is world famous.

So as you go through the exhibit, you see these other works, and they are quite interesting. And then you start to see just little paintings that he went through to develop different techniques in order to paint this, to paint that, and use of lights, and how to paint a dog. So you see all these little snapshots of paintings that are all interesting. But they really make no sense until you finally walk into the large exhibition area. And there is displayed probably eight feet tall and twelve feet wide the classic painting *Sunday Afternoon*. When you see that painting, suddenly everything makes sense. You understand what he was doing with this, and why he spent so long trying to develop this, and the use of light. And finally the big picture comes into play.

I remember later that day thinking to myself, *You know, that really is an accurate picture of what it's like to walk the walk of faith. What we see along the way are these little snapshots, and oftentimes they don't make sense, and it's hard to understand why things are the way they are. It isn't until we back up and see the bigger picture that we bring things back into perspective.*

We understand we live in the moment. But if our perspective is limited to the moment, we will lose our way. It's when we live in the moment that we give in to temptation. It's when we live in the moment that we are in despair and hopelessness because of the circumstances of life. But when we back out of that and again regain the big picture of what this is about, and that this world is not our home and we're just passing through. And we remember that we are headed to a better place for eternity. And we start to get the big picture in mind, it's then that we once again regain our hope and our faith to walk this walk.

Well, Psalm 118 is all about the big picture. As a matter of fact, Martin Luther, one of the most courageous Christians in the last two thousand years, wrote this about Psalm 118:

This is my own beloved psalm. Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, I fell in love with this psalm especially. Therefore I call it my own. When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even saints could not aid me, this psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles. As a result, it is dearer to me than all the wealth, honor, and power of the pope, the Turk, and the emperor. I would be most willing to trade this psalm for all of it.

--as quoted in James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms Volume 3*  
*Psalms 107-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p.963.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Psalm 118. Last week we looked at Psalm 113, and I mentioned there's a series of six psalms here that make up what are called the Egyptian Hallel psalms—Egyptian referring to the time when God delivered the nation from bondage in Egypt. Hallel is a Hebrew word that means *praise*. They're praising God for His salvation.

These six psalms were used as part of the Passover celebration. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the Passover meal, and the last four were then sung after the Passover meal. So again it's interesting to think that Jesus and the disciples sang this psalm as their final hymn before they left the upper room and made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane because this is very much a Messianic psalm. Jesus very much was the fulfillment of this particular psalm.

It's interesting that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a group of French Protestants called the Huguenots. And many hundreds and hundreds of these Huguenots were executed for their faith in the 1600s. And for whatever reason, they collectively really identified Psalm 118 as *their* psalm. History records that many of these Huguenots, in the last moments of their life before their execution, could be heard quoting the words of this particular psalm. So it has a rich history down through the last two thousand years.

Verse 1:

**Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting. Oh let Israel say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." Oh let the house of Aaron say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." Oh let those who fear the LORD say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting."** (Psalm 118:1-4; \*NSAB)

One little side note here: Oftentimes I hear people critique modern-day choruses because there is such a high level of repetition. I would strongly encourage you to be careful with that critique because much of the psalms are written that way. As a matter of fact, this psalm is written that way. Apparently God thinks that's a good way to worship. And I think it's helpful to take note of that.

Verse 1: **"Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting."** For most of us, those are familiar words that are kind of churchy-sounding words, and it's easy just to skip by that to something more. As a matter of fact, verse 1 and the final verse of the psalm are identical, which is pretty common in the psalms. It kind of creates these book ends and really tells us what the psalm is about. It's about the goodness of God which is demonstrated in His lovingkindness, and His lovingkindness endures forever.

But stop and think about that statement: **"His lovingkindness is everlasting."** It endures forever. When you think about it, it's an amazing thing. A thousand years from now God will love me like He loves me today.

There are many of you in this auditorium this morning that one day you stood on a platform like this with someone you were convinced was going to be your life partner. And before God and those witnesses you vowed that you would love that person till the day you die. But it didn't work out that way, did it? That person that you so deeply loved deeply wounded you, betrayed you, decided he or she didn't love you anymore, and walked away. And we are reminded that as much as we say we love one another, the reality is we can all identify people whom we have deeply loved who have deeply wounded us.

If you stop and think about it, what if God was like that? What if on the Day of Judgment we stand before God, and God says, "You know, I decided I don't love you anymore. Sorry." That's the reality of the statement, **"His love is everlasting."** It endures forever.

In the New Testament, Paul writes to the Corinthians, and he says “Faith, hope and love—these three, but the greatest of these is love.” Why does he say that? Because faith and hope are but for a season. Once we stand in the presence of Jesus we don’t need faith anymore. Once we stand in the presence of Jesus our hope has been realized. But love endures forever. It’s really a remarkable thought.

He goes from the nation of Israel to the house of Aaron, which would be the priests, down to the individuals which reminds us that when we come together corporately to worship, what makes corporate worship ‘worship’ is the worship of individuals. That’s kind of the way the psalm is reflected there. Verse 5:

**From my distress I called upon the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me in a large place. The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me; therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.** (vs. 5-7)

Now again, this is a remarkable thing when you stop and think about it. The Lord is for you. For those of us who have trusted Jesus as our Savior, God is *for us*. God is not playing games with us. God doesn’t want to somehow trick us. God is for us! God wants us to know Him. God wants us to succeed. God wants us to walk this walk of faith. God is for you!

All of us need people in our lives that are for us. When I was a child growing up, I always understood that my parents were for me. They were always encouraging me. I knew that no matter what happened in this world, I could always come home to a place where my parents were for me. And that gives us a great deal of security. That gives us a great deal of courage to face the stuff of this world.

I remember when I was in sixth grade, I had a great teacher—one of the greatest teachers I had in my schooling—at Prescott Elementary. She was a fantastic teacher. And when I think about why she was so fantastic, I would say more than anything else it was because she was “for us.” And we all knew that.

I remember one day in class she was talking about the importance of being a well-rounded person and not to limit ourselves to just certain narrow interests, to be interested in music and to be interested in literature and to be interested in science and to be interested in athletics, and to try to develop ourselves in all these areas of life. And then she said, “You know, the model of this is Jay McCoy.” Jay McCoy was kind of an All-American kid. He was a good athlete. He was a good musician. He was a good student. He had the whole package. And I remember thinking, *Yeah, Jay is really impressive.*

And then she said, “And the second person I would say that models this in our class would be Bryan Clark.” And I remember being absolutely stunned by that. I would have never imagined myself in those terms. And I remember just thinking, *No one else has ever said anything like that about me except my parents.* And what I knew deep inside is: She is *for me*. It was highly motivational. I am 48 years old. She said that when I was 12 years old. And I can remember it like it was yesterday. That’s the power of a teacher. That’s an impactful statement.

Three years ago the founding pastor, my pastoral mentor here, passed away. When I spoke at his funeral, trying to identify what it was that had really influenced my life, I said probably more than anything else is I always knew he believed in me, that he was *for me*. There is something about that that is incredibly powerful.

I really struggled early on with how God has wired me up in my personality and thinking, *I really don't fit the stereotype of a pastor. I don't think I wanna do this.* And he kept saying, "Bryan, you just have to be you. You have to be who you are." And I remember he believed in me. He was for me. And there's something about that that just gives us the courage to take steps ahead.

But there is nothing so remarkable as the reality that, *God* is for me. This God who created the universe, He's for me. He cheerleads me. We sang it earlier. He dances over me. He doesn't stomp over me. He dances over me. He loves me. He's excited about me. That's an amazing concept to process.

The psalmist says, "**The LORD is for me;...what can man do to me?**" If God is for me, what do I have to fear? There's only one opinion at the end of the day that matters, and that's God's opinion. And if I have to make a choice between being a people-pleaser or a God-pleaser, I'm going to have to choose to be a God-pleaser and live with the consequences of that. That's what the psalmist says, even for people that hate him that he looks at them with satisfaction, with triumph. In other words, he knows that at the end of the day there's only one opinion that matters, and that's God's opinion.

All of us have to be well aware of our tendency to be people-pleasers. Sometimes we refer to it as peer pressure. But at the end of the day I can't be a people-pleaser. That only gets me in trouble. I have to be a God-pleaser. There's only one opinion that ultimately matters, and that's God. And as long as God is happy with me, then I'll live with the consequences of that. And if walking with God causes some people to hate me, then I'll accept that because at the end of the day I still know it's God's opinion that matters most.

Verse 8:

**It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.** (vs. 8-9)

We talked about this several weeks ago that we need to trust in God alone, because as soon as we enter other people into that equation we begin to create a weak link in our chain. If I trust in God alone, I know that God is adequate and I have every reason for peace and security. But if I trust in God *plus* someone else, God *and* something else, then I've introduced a weak link into my chain. And that creates anxiety, because I know that's where the chain might fail.

You're blessed if you have people around you that you can trust, but ultimately our trust has to be in God—not our spouse, not our parents, not our leaders, not our government. At the end of the day God is ultimately worthy of our trust.

For those of you that are interested in such things, you might want to make a note that verses 8 and 9 are the exact mathematical middle of the Bible. Thirty-one thousand, one hundred and some verses, and verses 8 and 9 are the exact middle. I do find it interesting that these two verses reflect the message from Genesis to Revelation. That is, trust God, not man. Man will let you down. God will always be faithful.

**All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off. They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off. They surrounded me like bees; they were extinguished as a fire of thorns; in the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off.** (vs. 10-12)

He's probably talking about what we talked about in previous weeks. With the surrounding nations, there was just this sense of awareness and always living at risk. But understanding no matter what, God would ultimately be the deliverer. The words "cut them off" is actually the Hebrew 'circumcised.' It's a pretty graphic term, and maybe with that comes a sense of their flesh and blood. And God's unlimited in His power. So God will take care of me.

**You pushed me violently so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.** (vs. 13-16)

Verse 15 is an interesting verse. If you imagine the Hebrew people with their tents circled up, and maybe a group of spies comes from another nation and they're hiding in the hills and they're looking down on the Hebrew people. And what they observe day after day after day, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of what happens, is what's coming out of those tents is celebration, shouting and salvation. That's what God always intended for His people to represent—that because of the presence of God, there's fullness of joy. There's celebration. There's a realization of salvation no matter what they face, no matter what the circumstances. There was always this celebration of joy coming out of these tents. It's really a vivid imagery.

As a matter of fact, this is actually brought to life quite well in one of the great literary classics, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. If you think about the end of that story, the Grinch has stolen everything that he thinks Christmas is about, and he's hiding and he's waiting for the Who's to get up. He's convinced this is going to be a time of mourning. And the Who's all come out with nothing but just the spirit of Christmas. And of course they gather around and begin to sing this joyful song. And he hears them singing, and it's very unexpected. It's not what he imagined, and it causes him to back up and re-think things a little and think maybe Christmas isn't about all this stuff. Maybe there's something more.

Now Dr. Seuss needed to take the story just a little bit farther. But that is a very accurate picture of what's being said in Verse 15—that no matter what the circumstances, no matter what happens in life, that these people come out of their tents and they are filled with joy and rejoicing because God is there. And God is their celebration, and God is their Savior.

We understand every week, we as a people of God gather to worship. And while there are people that gather that are feeling like life is good and we sing songs about the goodness of God and it all seems to resonate and make sense, we also understand among us this morning there are people that are hurting, people that are struggling, people that are going through very difficult times. There are people for whom life just isn't making a whole lot of sense right now. And we understand on any given morning when we say, "God is good," we know that. We're not ignorant of such things.

But we also understand that when we see the big picture and see God's salvation, we understand we're not going to settle for this and this is not what we're going to endure for eternity, but we're on our way to a better place. And in that better place, there will be celebration forever. We know that. So we back away from the moment, and we recognize God is good. So regardless of the circumstances, we as a people of God shout and sing of the goodness of God. And the world looks on and says, "I don't understand that, but there's something very appealing about it. There's something within you that's missing in me, and I want to know what that is."

**I will not die, but live, and tell of the works of the LORD. The LORD has disciplined me severely but He has not given me over to death.** (vs. 17-18)

Verse 17 is a powerful statement. It sounds very much like Jesus in John 11. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall live, even if he dies." Martin Luther wrote verse 17 on the wall of his study. "I will not die; I will live, and I will declare the works of the Lord."

When many of these Huguenots were executed, the last words that came out of the mouths of many of them were verse 17, "I will not die; I will live, and I will tell of the works of the Lord." They're not saying that they won't die physically. But they're understanding that when they die, they will live, that they're headed into their eternity. Therefore what can man do to them? How can man in any way take that away from them?

It's interesting to think about Jesus singing these words just hours before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus understanding He would be the ultimate fulfillment, that though they would crucify Him on a cross, He would be raised back to life and He would give us victory over death so we too could say, "I will not die; I will live, and I will tell of the works of the Lord."

**Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will enter through it. I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation.**  
(vs. 19-21)

A great imagery there that God has provided a way of salvation. And when we go through His gate, when we go through His way, He provides us with the salvation that we might be declared righteous before God. Who is that gate? This is where the psalm becomes very Messianic:

**The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.** (vs. 22-24)

Verse 22 probably in this context was originally referring either to the nation of Israel or perhaps to one of the kings, but ultimately it's a reference to Christ. And that's very clear in the New Testament. As a matter of fact, the first time verse 22 is identified with Jesus is by Jesus Himself.

In Matthew chapter 21, Jesus has just come in on what we call Palm Sunday, and He's talking to the religious leaders, and He tells them a story. He says, "Let me tell you a story. Let's imagine there's a guy who owns a large vineyard, and He hires a group of people to work the vineyard. When it's time to collect the produce, the owner of the vineyard sends his slaves. But rather than give them the produce, these workers beat them up and even kill some of them. So the owner sends another group of slaves, and they do the same thing: They beat them up, and they kill some of them. So the owner says, 'You know, this time I'm going to send my son, and certainly they would know better than to do that to my son.' But they end up killing the son in order that they might take over the vineyard." And then Jesus identifies that the religious leaders were those people who have basically hijacked the Hebrew religion. And now God has sent His own Son. He sent prophets and they killed them. Now He has sent His own son. And then Jesus quotes verse 22 of Psalm 118. He says, "Are you not familiar with the verse that says, 'The stone which the builders rejected became the chief corner stone?'" And He identified Himself as that stone, that the very one that they were rejecting would be the one who would bring salvation to the world.

Peter identifies the same thing in Acts chapter 4. He again is talking to the religious leaders. Some of them may have been the same leaders. And he is telling them, “You are aware of the fact that this Jesus whom you rejected, that you crucified, actually did rise from the dead. And He’s alive, and He’s ascended to the Father. And are you aware that that stone which the builders rejected actually became the chief corner stone, and is the Messiah having come and brought salvation?”

It’s a great imagery. When we think about a corner stone in our culture, we tend to think about a small decorative stone that’s put in the corner of the building, and maybe you put the date on it and put a little information on it. But that’s not what’s meant at all. In the ancient world the corner stone was a huge stone. It was so big that once it was placed, it could not be moved, and that became the anchor of the building. All of the other stones were laid in such a way that the weight came down on the basis of gravity into this stone. And because it could not be moved, it was the corner stone. And everything in the building was built coming down into this corner stone. So it’s the idea that it is the one and only stone upon which this building is built.

Actually it’s a great response to those who proclaim a message of pluralism—that all ways lead to God, and there’s lots of different ways and lots of different religions that all lead to God, because at the end of the day you can’t have multiple corner stones. If you’re thinking art decorative stones, yes, you can. But if you’re thinking the ancient corner stone, there’s only one stone that anchors the building because gravity has to feed everything down to that corner for it to work. There is no place for multiple stones. There’s one stone, and Jesus is identified as the one corner stone. In the previous verses, it says, “He is the gate. He is the way.” Jesus Himself said both of those things. “I am the gate; I am the door; I am the way of salvation.”

Verse 24: **“This is the day which the LORD has made.”** It’s not referring to, “This is a nice day; it’s 80 degrees and kinda breezy.” It has nothing to do with that. It has nothing to do with the weather, and it has nothing really to do with the day. It has to do with the day of salvation. It’s referring to the day when the corner stone that was rejected became the salvation for all mankind. And as Jesus hung on the cross, that was the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan, that salvation would come to sinful people. **“This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”**

The other verse that the Huguenots were often heard quoting in their moment of execution was this verse. In that moment they would say, **“This is the day which the LORD has made,”** affirming again the reality of their salvation, knowing they were going to meet their Savior. **“Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”**

**O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; we have blessed you from the  
house of the LORD.** (vs. 25-26)

In verse 25, **“Oh LORD, do save,”** or “save us now.” It’s the Hebrew ‘Hosanna.’ You remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, they were shouting “Hosanna! Save now! Save now!” which comes right out of this psalm, followed by the statement, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.” They were quoting Psalm 118.

Interestingly enough, on that Palm Sunday that would have been the day that the people were required to identify the lamb and take that lamb into their home which would be the sacrificial lamb on the upcoming Passover. It was on that day that Jesus entered the city identifying Himself as the Passover Lamb, the one who would give His life for the sins of the world.

**The LORD is God, and He has given us light; bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting.** (vs. 27-29)

Verse 27 is a great statement of the deity of Christ. If you ever want to find an Old Testament verse that identifies that Jesus was God, this would be a great verse because the previous verses clearly in the New Testament identify Jesus as being the stone that was rejected, the chief corner stone. It identifies Jesus as the one who entered into the city when they said, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD." What follows that is the LORD, this Yahweh, this Jehovah, this One we've identified, *is God*. That's the statement there, and a clear statement that He's headed to the altar to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

But not only is He *the* God (verse 28), He is *my* God. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, I can go from a relationship with *the* God to Him becoming *my* God. The salvation then becomes personal. And then he again repeats on the basis of that, **"Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting."**

Life in the moment can be very difficult. But when we pull back from the moment and we see the big picture again, we are reminded that no matter what I'm going through, no matter what the challenges of the day are, no matter what life looks like today, I understand I'm not going to settle for this. This world is not my home; I'm just passing through. And on the basis of what Jesus has done for me on the cross, I'm headed for a better place. So I have every reason for hope. I have every reason to say, "God is good and His love endures forever." I understand on the basis of Jesus' shed blood that God is for me. If God is for me, what can man do to me? I have nothing to fear.

I understand that there is one gate, one way of salvation. And that's the stone that was rejected that became the corner stone, the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for the sins of the world, that those who put their faith in Jesus alone for salvation can now call *the* God *my* God and know that I will dwell with Him in paradise forever.

God is good.

William Cowper was a 16<sup>th</sup> Century English writer and by some people's accounts the greatest English writer of all time. He was a very fragile man. He was fragile emotionally. He was fragile physically. In his younger days the kids bullied him and pushed him around, and he had a pretty difficult life. His mom died when he was six years old. His dad pushed him into law school; and when it came time to take the bar exam, he was so overwhelmed with anxiety that he had a mental breakdown. He tried to kill himself by drowning himself to death. They put him in an insane asylum where he would remain for the next 18 months.

But while in that insane asylum he read through the book of Romans. And for the first time in his life, he recognized that he could be accepted by God, not on the basis of religious performance but on the basis of Jesus' shed blood. And there in that insane asylum he came into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Besides the book of Romans, the passage of Scripture that deeply touched him was Psalm 118. And in that insane asylum he loudly declared, "I shall not die; I shall live, and I will tell of the

works of the Lord.” And with that he was released. He became friends with John Newton, the writer of the great hymn *Amazing Grace*, and the two of them partnered up for the next twenty years and put together what’s considered one of the greatest hymn books in the history of the church. We probably know William Cowper best for his hymn, *There is a Fountain*. Listen as I read the words of this song how well he captures the truth of Psalm 118:

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains

The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day,  
And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood  
Shall never lose its pow’r,  
Till all the ransomed Church of God  
Be saved to sin no more

E’er since, by faith, I saw the stream  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme  
And shall be till I die

When this poor lispings, stamm’ring tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then in a nobler, sweeter song  
I’ll sing Thy pow’r to save

God is good and His love endures forever.

*Our Father, we are thankful that You are good. Lord, You will love us as much in a hundred thousand years as You love us today. Lord, we understand sometimes this life can be hard. If our perspective is limited to the moment, it’s hard to sing that You’re good. But Lord, when we back away and we see the big picture, we are reminded that You are for us, that You have made a way of salvation, that it was God Himself who became the sacrificial lamb to make a way of salvation. Lord, I pray this morning that we might be reminded anew and afresh that this world is not our home, that we don’t have to settle for this, that we are headed to a better place. And in light of eternity we say, “You are good.” In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

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