

This is the last sermon in this series of sermons on the psalms and the overall theme of this sermon is that God's steadfast love endures for ever; and is based on Psalm 118 verses 19 to 29.

Psalms have a sort of duality about them, in that they were inspired by God and written as prayerful poetry by king David and others in response to certain situations at that time, and they also have a prophetic element of forewarning of things yet to come.

The truth is of course that most of the psalms are almost ageless and can be interpreted in many ways, and seen in many lights; as we have seen in our series of sermons on the psalms, and psalm 118 is no exception.

Now before we deal with the last 11 verses we need to review the first 18 verses. In these verses the psalmist had a vision; he saw that God was on his side, and that with God on his side that he had no need to fear; that mere mortals could not do him harm, he could now look in triumph on those who hated him, and although he was surrounded by his enemies like a swarm of bees, God would protect him.

Today of course we are faced with, and surrounded by, another type of enemy, the corona virus, but the principle of God's protection remains good. Yes of course some people have already died, and some one we know may well be taken in the future, but through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ we still have no need to fear because God will protect and save us to eternal life.

And in verse 14 the psalmist wrote, "The Lord is my strength and my might; He has become my salvation." These are similar sentiments we heard in psalm 91, which, greatly préciséd reads, 'You who live in the shelter and protection of God need not fear any evil'.

Turning now to psalm 118 verse 19, our first verse reads, "Open to me the Gates of Righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord." Now the phrase gates of righteousness needs an explanation.

Firstly, the word righteousness, so who was righteous, in the context of ancient Israel? In psalm 24 verse 3 we read, ""Who shall ascend the Hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his Holy Place?" And the answer to those two questions is in the following verse 4, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

Now the phrase, 'who may ascend the hill of the Lord', clearly doesn't mean who can climb the hill to the temple, because anybody who can walk can do that. No, it means who can enter into the presence of God, or in ancient Israel, who can enter the Holies and Holies of the temple where God lived. And the answer to that, at that time was only the High Priest, he was the only who could stand in the Holy of Holies.

For the Jews, God lived in a special place within the temple called the Holy of Holies, where God sat on the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant.

So the phrase "Gates of righteousness" meant the gates to the Holy of Holies where God lived, but also where the High Priest could go, but only once a year, which was on the day of atonement.

But in this case, it was the psalmist who was asking for the gates of the temple to be opened, verse 19, because God had shown him a vision and God had become his salvation verse 21 and he wanted to thank God personally face to face as it were. However such a request in those days would have been denied ordinary people; but of course this psalmist could have been a king.

In verse 22 we read, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone". In Matthew 21:33 to 40, Jesus related the parable of the Vineyard and the Rebellious Tenants to the chief priests and elders of Israel, and in that parable, the master planted a vineyard, leased it to tenants, and went to another country, and at harvest time he sent servants to collect his portion of the harvest.

But the tenants seized his servants and killed them. So again he sent more servants, more than the first time, and they treated them in the same way.

Finally, the master sent his son in the belief that they wouldn't dare treat him in the same way, but when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is his son, let us kill him, and get his inheritance'. And the tenants killed him.

Jesus then asked what will the master do to those tenants, and the chief priests and elders replied, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and will lease out the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the produce at harvest time'.

In those verses, Jesus is the rejected son who was made the cornerstone. The tenants were the chief priests and elders of Israel. Jesus' parable pronounced judgement on those religious leaders for failing to acknowledge him as the Messiah.

When the psalmist wrote his verse about the cornerstone, in effect he had seen the rejection of the Jews to see that God was much more than their God, that he was in fact the God of all humanity, and that they had to introduce him, and share him with the Gentiles, and if the Jews didn't accept that, then he would pass the kingdom on to those who would.

In verse 23 the psalmist writes, "This revelation is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." That verse shows the psalmist joy at realising that God had revealed to him something of the future which gave him great joy.

We now come to verse 24 of our psalm, "This day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." This verse is often quoted as recognition that the Lord has given us this day, and we should rejoice in it, which is clearly a good thing to do to keep in touch with God and thank him for the day. If we focus on the good rather than the bad, especially at this time of trial, we will be able to get through each day more positively, and more creatively, however, I do appreciate that sometimes, and for some people, that's easier said than done.

In verse 26 we read, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." The psalmist is of course referring to the coming of the Messiah, at sometime in the future, which generations of Jews had been longing for, and would continue to do so for many more generations to come.

In verse 27, the psalmist writes, "The Lord is God, and he has given us light." This is not physical light, but spiritual light, and we now know the light to be Jesus Christ for we know that Christ is the light of the world.

In verse 28 the psalmist says, "You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you". To be able to say, "You are my God." Is a life changing affirmation. The person who goes through life knowing that they belong to God knows that they have a true friend who will never let them down. Indeed the last verse of our psalm reads, "O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever."

There can only be one response to that, and that is "Alleluia, Praise the Lord"

May the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all and keep you safe.