

Psalm 118 // Palm Sunday: Singing at the Dinner Table

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[0 : 00] This evening's reading is found on page 616 of the Church Bibles and we're going to be reading Psalm 118.!

Let those who fear the Lord say, His love endures forever. When hard-pressed, I cried to the Lord. He brought me into a spacious place.

The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The Lord is with me. He is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans.

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord, I cut them down. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the Lord, I cut them down.

They swarmed around me like bees, but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns. In the name of the Lord, I cut them down. I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me.

[1 : 27] The Lord is my strength and my defence. He has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous.

The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. The Lord's right hand is lifted high. The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. I will not die, but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open for me the gates of the righteous. I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks for you answered me. You have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice today and be glad. Lord, save us.

[2 : 30] Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God and he has made his light shine on us.

With bows in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God and I will praise you. You are my God and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever. Thanks, Amy.

Yeah, so tonight, because it's Palm Sunday, we are looking at Psalm 118. The reason we're looking at Psalm 118 in particular, so Palm Sunday, just in case for any of you who don't know what Palm Sunday is, is how we mark the beginning of Holy Week.

When we look back to the day where Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the crowds gathered around him in celebration of who he is. And they said, Hosanna. This is from Mark's gospel.

[3 : 34] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest heaven. These words that the people shout come directly from this Psalm.

That's why we're looking at it tonight. And the Psalms are the song books of God's people. They cover every kind of human emotion possible, from sadness and grief and depression, right through to celebration and joy and goodness.

And the Psalm we're looking at tonight is one of the second group. It's ones of celebration and joy and goodness. And I apologize if my accent and tone of voice does not communicate celebration and joy and goodness.

But I grew up in Oban and this is about as excited as we can get. But that's the heart of the Psalm. It's a Psalm of thanksgiving. But it's also a Psalm that would have been sung during the Passover meal.

So Passover was central to the celebration of God's people where they would gather and remember when God intervened in history to save his people from the Egyptians and save them from death by the giving of a lamb.

[4 : 39] And so they would have sung this song during the Passover festival as well. Why I think that's important is because as we enter the Easter week and we think and look ahead to Jesus' death and resurrection, that would have meant as Jesus was at the dinner table with his disciples on the last night before they had dinner, they would have sung this song together.

Quite likely, it would have been the last song they sang together before he went into the garden and the whole process of what it meant for him to be betrayed began. So as we go through this Psalm tonight, I guess I invite you to not just imagine this being sung by crowds of people as Jesus entered Jerusalem, but also imagine Jesus and the disciples in the lamplight of the upper room with the cross just about 12 hours ahead of him as they sing this song together.

So let's pray and then we'll get into Psalm 118. Father, I pray and ask that in your goodness, in your kindness and in your mercy, as we consider this song from long ago, that we don't see it as just a historical document, but we see it as people paying testimony to who you are.

We acknowledge that you're the same God today. So as we look at this Psalm, would you give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the goodness of who you are? I ask that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, this is a long Psalm and there is loads packed into it because it kind of connects all over the scriptures as well as just being a song about who God is. I was saying to somebody earlier today that I tried to cut down what I wanted to say tonight, and in the process of cutting down after two hours, it somehow added a whole page of extra notes.

[6 : 24] But then that's partly because I'm not very good at being concise, but do not worry. We have points that we're going to stick to tonight. And the first one is the very simple refrain that comes right at the beginning of this Psalm, which you probably heard four times.

His love endures forever. His love endures forever. The Lord is good. His love endures forever. And the Psalmist, the writer of this song, is inviting us all to join in and celebrate and affirm that reality.

But the word love used here and throughout this Psalm, this idea of an everlasting word, that's the Hebrew word *hesed*, *hesed*, love. Don't worry, you don't need to know Hebrew.

I don't know Hebrew. I know as much Hebrew as Bible dictionaries tell me. But it's a rich, deep word for love. It's not just as simple as the way we use the word love to kind of indicate we quite like things.

It's a rich and relational word. The love of God, the everlasting love of God that this Psalm is talking about and starts with and wants to essentially batter in four times, this is what the love of the Lord is like.

[7 : 25] This is what it's like. It is not an obligational love. Like God just has to or supposed to love us in the some way. I don't know if you ever like sometimes experience potentially, unfortunately, maybe from parents or guardians or leaders, like they love you because they have to.

Like you've kind of got to be loved because you're kind of part of the club. That is not the way this love is talked about. That kind of love that tolerates you.

This is a deep, committed love. This love is God's binding love. It's sometimes called in the Bible his covenant love, his faithful love. It represents the commitment of God that he has made in relationship to his people, something he instigates, something he does.

A commitment to be our God, to be in the present and in the future. It is also, it's not simply an emotional word, it is an action-orientated love.

It's a love that does something. It's a love that engages. Sometimes I think when we talk about love in the spiritual sense, we talk about it as like some sort of vague cloud that hangs around out there. And if we bump into it one day, then maybe we'll experience it.

[8 : 32] God's love chooses. God's love moves. It has direction. It's got action. And it's a love that persists even when the other person can't reciprocate it.

In biblical terms, it's the kind of love God shows his people again and again and again throughout the scriptures. It's his faithful, sacrificial love.

And it is not dependent on their worthiness. It doesn't not involve the people, but the thrust of it is about who God is. This is God's love and commitment to be God's people, even when they fail to live up to their part of the relationship.

It's a radically unique love and a commitment that has its origins in this ancient covenant. This is kind of, to go into some of the story of the scriptures in Genesis 15, when God is with Abraham, the founder of God's people.

He makes this, essentially makes a deal. It's a very old-fashioned way of making a deal where God and neighbor, God says, I promise to be your God. You are faithful to me and promise to follow me. And they do this thing where they, you can ask somebody else more questions about this later.

[9 : 38] We're not going to see the details of it. But the way they do it is they cut a pile of animals in half. It's the way you would have made a deal back then. And one person would have said, right, here's the deal. We both walk through the animals. And that shows we're signing up to the deal.

And you're kind of saying, if we don't keep our end of the bargain, I'll be ripped apart. The twist is, when God makes this deal with Abraham, so God, represented by fire, goes through it, what you'd expect next is Abraham would go back through to sign his half of the deal.

But in that story, God goes back through again. God goes through twice. God's hesed love, his mercy love, his faithful love says, I will love you knowing that you will not be able to stand up, hold up to all of what this means for you to love me back.

He essentially says, may I be torn apart if I fail to uphold my end of the covenant. What God is doing here is making an everlasting promises to take the consequences of both sides.

And if either party breaks the agreement, which humanity, as the scriptures are going to tell, regularly do, he says, I will obey the curse. I will be torn apart.

[10 : 44] But it's a love that says, it does not say, sorry, if you're faithful, I'll bless you. It says, even when you're unfaithful, if you trust in me and know me as this loving God, I will still be faithful to my promises and my name.

I don't know about you, but when I think of the word love and the idea of God's love, and we hear that idea, I think I can have a hugely deficient understanding of what that word can mean.

As it's often based on the principles we learn in this life, because that's how we often learn what love is like. So God's love sometimes might, he might love us, but he might also kind of be eternally disappointed in you at the same time.

That he's temperamental. That his patience is slowly ebbing away. And that while he forgives, he does not forget. All it takes is a series of bad days, bad thoughts, bad actions, and God takes a big step back until you prove yourself to him again.

That is not the kind of love God is talking about here. And having a deficient view of love can also give us a deficient view of sin. We reduce it down to some personal or cultural choices, creating a kind of bizarre karma-like faith.

[11 : 52] If I do this and don't do that, then maybe I'll get God's blessing. And it has nothing to do with this beautiful, full, everlasting love that God says, this is who I am. This is what I am like.

And we'll have our old different lists of what that thing might say, but God's love knows that we cannot keep our end of the relationship and asks us not to pretend to somehow be good enough, but instead to see and know and trust at his love and to live a life in response to that.

Now, if you think, why am I laboring God's love so much? Well, I think it's a pretty important theme in the scriptures, if nothing else. But everything that comes from this psalm flows from this idea of who God is and what his love is like, how committed it is, how strong it is, how passionate it is, and how the emphasis is on his love, not our behavior.

His love changes who we are, but that's not the starting point. The starting point is a cry out, let the house of Aaron, Israel, say his love endures forever.

And so because of that love, the psalmist in the next few verses, we're going to kind of power through 21 verses here. The psalmist goes on to describe how they have experienced this everlasting love of God.

[13 : 05] So love in action, protection, life, and presence. So first the writer talks about how there was a time when they were hard pressed in verse five. When I was hard pressed, I cried out to the Lord and he brought me into a spacious place.

Other translations translate hard pressed as anguish. I was hard, like stuff, stuff was tough, stuff was going on and I cried out to the Lord. And their experience of crying out to the Lord is being led

into a spacious place.

What's going on here is the full knowledge of God, of who he is and what he's like, gives the psalmist the confidence to cry out about whatever they're experiencing in life, to fully know who God is.

And they experience something like being in a spacious place, like a peace. This is not God saying, let's go off to the Mediterranean in a couple of weeks and get you away from all your troubles and a nice spacious place there. It's a spacious place internally, emotionally, spiritually, mentally.

And we know that feeling, don't we? The idea of us being humans, when we have been holding on to things like pain or fear or guilt or confusion, and you finally share it with someone who listens and cares, it's like a giant exhale, isn't it?

[14:17] I think that's something that's going on in this verse. They cry out to the everlasting love of God and find that God brings them to a spacious place. If that's true with humans, how much more, therefore, is this true with this kind of God?

I don't know about you, I checked this. Sorry if this example is in any way offensive to anybody from any kind of background I describe here. But for me, growing up, so I grew up going through a Catholic education till the age of I didn't really do anything with God until my early 20s.

But I was quite confused when I first came across a lot of Christians who talked about having a personal relationship with Jesus. That they could talk to Jesus about whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, about whatever they wanted. So I was like, surely God's got bigger things to do than to listen to you moan about stuff.

And for me, I was like, that was kind of, kind of inadvertently a picture I was kind of taught at school. Like, you need to leave Jesus alone. He's got big things going on. If you've got minor things, you've got saints for that who deal with certain areas of life, you can go to them.

Bigger problems, probably Mary. And then you have to work your way up because God's running the universe. And so I came across these Christians who would say, we can talk to Jesus about anything. Then I slowly realized, actually, they had, a lot of them had a similar mentality.

[15:31] Like, God, you shouldn't bother God with what's going on in your life. Actually, he's got bigger things to do than listen to you moan about how you're experiencing life. And I think it's quite a corrupt way of seeing and misunderstanding the everlasting love of God.

In their anguish, they cry out to God about whatever is happening. Not that God's some sort of personal PA who then runs off and deals with all our problems, but relational engagement with a God.

He says, bring all of who you are before me. Bring it. Bring it to me. In fact, 1 Peter 5, verse 6 and 7 says, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may lift you up in due time.

Cast all your anxieties onto him because he cares for you. Partly, I love that picture because if you're under God's hand and God's hand's under you, then you're being held. But 1 Peter defines humility as someone who casts their anxieties onto God.

That's how he defines humility. Therefore, implying the opposite is true. Sometimes I think when we misunderstand God's character, we think we have to hold this stuff and we think that is faith. Crying out to God is an act of faith.

[16:41] As we are acknowledging who he is, that he's more powerful, more caring, more loving, more resourceful than anything we can muster on our best days. And if we know God's love is everlasting and committed, then like the psalmist, we're free to engage with God, whatever is happening in our lives.

And that is a spacious place. The psalmist goes on and he starts to describe God as a helper and a refuge. The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid.

Because if you have this God who's loved like this and you can say anything you want to him and he holds you, then this is what he is like. I will not be afraid. What can a person do to me?

The Lord is with me. He is my helper. I will look on triumph with my enemies. This isn't arrogance from the psalmist. This is a response to who they know God to be and what his love is like.

They conclude that it is better to take refuge in God than to trust any particular person or princes or human power. And in verse 10 to 16, they start to tell this story of a distress in battle where they were so embattled, they feel like they were surrounded by a swarm of bees.

[17:51] And despite the danger, God protected them. And they cut off their attackers in the name of the Lord, which is biblical language, as God's representatives. God protects his people and his love defends them.

The victory leads to a celebration in the camp of God's people where they sing in verse 14, the Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation.

And verse 14, again, is using like this word for the Lord as a rare word and it emphasizes like an intimate and personal aspect of God's character. And the verse is also a direct quote of Moses' song in Exodus 15, where after the people of God are fleeing away and the Egyptian armies would have been coming at them, which would have felt like this huge, massive thing.

Their experience was God defeating them. Egypt, the superpower of the day in the known world. And at that time, we'd appeared so much more powerful than this little band of slaves trying to escape.

Yet they sing loudly as Moses sung, as a testimony to God's power, his might, his love, his ability to come in, despite what the circumstances round about them would have looked like, and do something miraculous as a response to his love and the people's faith in him.

[19:10] They sing loudly, their voices heard in the camp after the battle, and they sing the right hand of the Lord, a reference again to Exodus 15, celebrating power and strength.

Not power and strength just to show off, but power and strength is just God to display his glory by claiming a people for himself, because they're his and he loves them. And then that leads us into these verses in 17 and 21, which 17 to 21 become the heartbeat of the psalm, because the psalmist is talking about God's love, and he's talking about how God has protected them and kept them safe. This all builds to a kind of crescendo at the heart of the psalm. These stories kind of build up into this statement, where he says, in verse 17, I will not die, but I will live, and I will proclaim what the Lord has done.

The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. So the writer makes this really bold claim that they will not die.

Now, partly that's a temporal thing about knowing that God has protected them, and so he has spared them. But because of the way they know God to be, they are confident that their lives are now secure with God. I mean, even in that verse, and we can't get into it tonight, there's an idea that the Lord has chastened me severely or disciplined me severely. I mean, that is essentially the psalmist looking back at his life and thinking, these things that were hard were actually of God's doing so that I could learn to love and trust him more. I mean, that's a whole other talk in and of itself, that we can have these hard moments in life and actually think maybe God's abandoning us, and in hindsight realize quite the opposite. God was letting that happen in order to draw us closer to him. We're not talking about that tonight, though. That's one of the pages I cut out.

[21:02] But then the writer makes this bold claim because they know who God to be. They are confident their lives are secure. But then, it's like as the singing, now again, they'd have sung this psalm as a procession as they would have gone to the temple as well as at the Passover meal. So they'd been walking. Imagine they're walking to the temple, and they sing verses 19 and 20, open for me the gates of righteousness, and I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. So the gates of righteousness would have been the gates of the temple, which was the dwelling place of God, the center point in the people of God's faith, of where he was, a bit like a lightning rod for all of who God was, the place of his presence and goodness and beauty. Such a sacred place that people couldn't actually go near it without sacrificing because of how perfect and pure God was. In comparison, they couldn't stand in that place. And now they're boldly saying, let me in, let me in, open the gate and let me in. They've gone from like, God is loving, here's all the ways of what his love looks like, to like, I'm not going to die, and I want to be in God's presence. Like, if you're singing, this song gets louder and louder and louder. It's like the requests and promises are getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

As they say, let me enter the presence of the Lord. They sing that because God's love is everlasting. They will not die. It's pretty big things to claim. And then in verse 21, I thank you that you have answered me and you have become my salvation. God has become their salvation. God, the person, the person of God is their salvation. Their salvation is God himself, not just what God has done. God has become their salvation. And as the song tracks through these promises of who God is and what he is like, both as how he describes himself, but also how he has demonstrated that in their lives.

[23:05] The rest of the psalm will show us, I hope by the end of this, you'll follow it, how it is possible to have this kind of confidence about what they are singing about. And for us, given it's Palm Sunday, especially in the person of Jesus, because this psalm, like all the psalms, are

actually songs about the divinity and kingship of Jesus, the son. So we'll move into the rest of the psalm, into verse 22 to 24.

We talk about the cornerstone. That's the best graphic I could find. I tried to find simple graphics. That's like a cornerstone because it's something really important that holds everything else together. So yeah, you can talk to me about that later if you really wish. So the cornerstone, verses 22 to 24. So suddenly there's a bit of a shift. I give thanks. You've answered me.

You've become my salvation. Then verse 22 starts talking about building techniques. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice today and be glad.

Somebody was telling me that's a song you learned in Sunday school. This is the day the Lord has made. Is that right? I learned that song first at Celtic Park. We have very different words. You can tell me that. I'll tell you that later if you want as well. Anyway, we first have this image of an ancient building practice. So the cornerstone was either the big foundation that the whole building would stand upon or was the key. Either way, it's a very, very, very important stone that held the rest of the building together. And the picture is of skilled builders rejecting a particular stone as unsuited for the purpose of what they're building. And not only are they wrong, they've thrown away the most important stone. And the psalm, the psalm is comparing God's people to such a stone. They've been thrown away, and the world has thought little of them. But God has chosen his people to be a cornerstone of his great plan for the world. This is the Lord's doing.

That's what it says in verse 23. It's not human accomplishment. But Jesus, hundreds of years later, we're told in the final year of his life, he is standing in the temple doing what he does, teaching about the kingdom of God. And his popularity is increasing. And we know from the New Testament that became a big problem for the religious leaders of the time, who they thought of themselves as being in charge, essentially, of God's kingdom on earth. They opposed Jesus pretty much for that simple point. He threatened to undermine their authority, and the way Jesus did things was a bit too uncontrollable for their likings. So they plot to kill him. As Jesus seemed to consistently disrupt their systems with all his chat of generosity and loving the outsider and love and forgiveness.

[25 : 46] So Jesus, they essentially asked the theological equivalent to Jesus in the temple of, who do you think you are? And so Jesus replies with a story. And he tells him a story of a man who owned a vineyard.

And in that vineyard, he went away and left it to some tenants and said, you look after it, care for it, and I'll come back to get the proceeds of the vineyard, which I assume would have been wine. And he goes off, and he then sends a servant to get the harvest. That's the word. Thank you.

Get the harvest. But what the servant finds, the kind of the people have been looking after the vineyard, which he's done with the one, and actually think they'll keep the proceeds for themselves. And they decide, let's kill this guy. So kill him. So he sends another servant.

Same thing happens. So the owner of the vineyard thinks, well, I'll send my son. Well, surely they'll have more respect for my son. But instead, if you know the story, Jesus says, and they kill the owner of the vineyard's son. And then Jesus explains the parable by quoting this psalm. He says, have you not read the scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what, this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

So he explains to the people listening that in the story, God is the owner of the vineyard. The shock of the story would have been that the tenants are actually God's people. They've become the ones who are corrupt and throw away the messengers, and ultimately will kill the son, which is a prophecy about himself. He's like, I am the, Jesus is saying, I am the cornerstone. You're about to do the same to me. They were supposed to give them credit for this life through worship and obedience, but they rejected the son. Jesus describes to the religious leaders exactly what is about to happen to him. He was a stone which the people in charge would say, this one will not do.

[27 : 43] We're not building our kingdom and lives on this guy. Some of you might have heard this example before, but I think of this as a, Jesus is like Obi-Wan Kenobi moment. So in the original Star Wars film where Obi-Wan Kenobi is like an old man, Darth Vader's like, I'm going to kill you. He said, you can, you can strike me down, Darth, but I'll become stronger than you could possibly imagine.

That's essentially what Jesus is saying here. He said, you can kill me, and you will kill me, but I'm going to come back stronger. I'll be the cornerstone. A whole new kingdom will be built on your rejection on me. Now again, remember, Jesus was singing this song with his friends over dinner.

He knew he was the cornerstone and was about to be rejected in the most ultimate ways, relationally by his followers, physically in the torture and execution, and spiritually in being separated from God. So imagine Jesus sitting, singing this song of celebration with his friends. He knew he was going to, they were going to reject him, and he sings, this is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes, like knowing what he knew, singing, the Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice and be glad in it, as you know you're about to be rejected. What would that have been like for Jesus, to sit there and sing these songs? This psalm that proclaims God's got something good happening, but what in front of you looks and feels like tragedy and death and destruction? It's a form of faith that fully acknowledges the real questions and pains of the day, but also holds on to God who is, who he says he is, and is up to something more than we see in the moment. Jesus was not swept away by a storm of angry and uncontrolled people.

His rejection was according to an intentional plan. It says here, this was the Lord's doing. And that's a tension in faith, isn't it? That we have these moments where we're like, what looks in front of me like defeat and death. Can we sing these songs as Jesus sang, claiming something good about God? That's not a kind of tawdry, like, oh, let's just ignore life, and faith's amazing, and everything's great. But in the pain of what was coming, God had something bigger and better planned. The cross, it turns out, was the mysterious work of God redeeming all things, bringing life out of death, creating beauty from ugliness, and realigning reality in a way that no one saw coming. What looked like ultimate defeat was actually ultimate victory. And there's a promise there for all of us in Christ, that whatever we're experiencing in this moment is never God's final word on our lives. And Jesus must have prayed this as a song of praise, but also his promise at the same time as he went to his next step towards the cross. While we have the picture of the cornerstone, thanks, Alan, we now have the picture of the sacrifice in verses 25 and 27.

So the psalmist then starts saying, Lord, save us. Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine on us with bows in hand. Join in the festival procession up to the horns of the altar.

[31 : 05] So the psalmist prays, save us, which is where we get the word Hosanna from. So when they're shouting Hosanna, that is this word, save us, which is what the crowd would have shouted at Jesus.

And they would have shouted that at Jesus when he entered, partly because of response to who he was and who he was saying he, and how he demonstrated that. But the people believed God still reigned as king despite all their circumstances. They believed God would return to Jerusalem, take his throne, and bring peace despite humanity's consistent brokenness, division, sin, corruption, selfish impulses, our constant choice to turn away God and do our own thing. All the ways we seek to define what the word sin means. And the crowds would have used this word on Palm Sunday to recognize that they thought Jesus was the salvation being talked about in this psalm. But especially if you're here this morning, you've already heard some of this, but what they expected Jesus to be was not who he turned out to be. Because Jesus came, they expected Jesus to arrive in Jerusalem like some sort of warrior king who'd come and kick out the Romans, reestablish the people of God as the premium empire in the world, and everything would be amazing. But when Jesus talked about the kingdom of God, about what it meant to reign under God's kingdom, he taught many different things. Things that surprised people and offended many.

We're taught often in the world, I guess even if you watch the news at the moment, a powerful kingdom needs to be as strong, needs to impose its will, needs to defeat its enemies. But Jesus talked about a kingdom which said the greatest people are the weakest ones. People who love and serve the poor.

He said living under God's reigns means responding evil with love, with forgiveness and peace.

This was an upside down kingdom. This kind of stuff Jesus got killed for.

The Lord is God and he has made his light to shine on us, verse 27. This verse with bowing, this is this link to sacrifice on the lamb. It's hard to put a sacrifice as a lamb and put an actual picture of a lamb up. But then I think whilst it is a bit of a twee picture, it's getting the idea of Jesus' innocence, his purity, his kindness, his goodness. And that is what was given for the people. And this language in verse 27 of the bows and hands join the festival procession is the picture of bringing a sacrifice to the altar. Again, Jesus would have sang this with his friends about himself. His light to shine upon us, the celebration of the light of the Lord, is followed up with this chord. So another translation puts

it, bind the festal sacrifice with chords up to the horns of the altar. Jesus would have sat singing that the cornerstone becomes the cornerstone because we bring a sacrifice of purity. And it is given, given in response to God's plan, but also given to secure God's people. And he just sat and sung those words about himself, knowing he was that sacrifice. And where do we see the light of the glory of God? In the face of Jesus

[34 : 19] Christ. And nowhere does the light of God shine more brightly and more beautifully on his people, I'd argue, than when Jesus, God's own son, like in the story Jesus tells, ascends the altar, this time in Calvary, on the cross. And gives his life there so that we can say he has become our salvation, as the psalmist does.

We're told of Jesus in Hebrews 12, For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. If Jesus was a mere human like me, I mean, he was fully human, we'll not get into that. He, I, would have been like, I'm not doing this, this is too much. But thankfully, none of us ever have to go into that position because none of us would ever be able to do it. Yet the purity and goodness of God made manifest in a person, sits with friends who will betray him and sings a song, sings a song of love and sacrifice and realizes and knows it's about him too. This is the love of God in action. Jesus, the son of God, sitting at a table, singing songs of God's goodness and love that exists and follows through and rescues even when the others in the covenant fail. Jesus sings this song with his friends who will abandon and betray him. And he does it because this song is a song about him. And he is God and God is love.

Which leads us to the end. Verses 28 and 29. That's a table with people sitting around it. All this brings us to a place of praise and reaffirmation of God's everlasting love. That's how this psalm ends. You're my God and I will praise you. You're my God and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever. This is not like a twee, everything is amazing praise. But also it's not a kind of stoic, well the joy of the Lord. We're very joyous in the Lord. But actually it's a group of people who recognize this love is unique. It is everlasting. It is sacrificial. And to look at it, to see it, and to see it not just as an idea, but made flesh and walk and live and love and give himself away.

And then sit with his friends who he knows will betray him and says, this is also, this is why I'm here. To reclaim you. To become a cornerstone for something new. It's a right response. The right response is the response of this psalm. We praise. We give testimony. You are my God. This is what the psalmist is doing. It's telling the story of who God is. Part of the manifesto, for want of a better word, of the people of God, is to be the people of praise who recognize who God is and tell the story of who he is and what he is like, of his everlasting love. This is love made perfect in Jesus' giving of himself. Just as God promised to Abraham on the cross, Jesus himself was torn apart. Just as God promised.

[37 : 24] It's a praise based on knowing God's love is utterly unique because it's self-sacrificing, grace-based commitment. It's not conditional in our performance, but grounded in God's own character and fulfilled through Christ. This turns most religions on its head. God doesn't say, as Tim Keller famously said, obey and I'll accept you, but rather, I have accepted you at infinite cost to myself. No, obey out of love. And what does obedience look like to Jesus when he's asked what's the most important commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your body and your soul and love your neighbor as yourself. Obedience and love are not separated. They're never separated. Jesus never separates those things. Jesus becomes the cornerstone of a new kingdom, one which we are called to demonstrate and model this kind of love to everyone around us, regardless of who they are, but because of how good we are, because of the goodness of the God who gives himself forever. So we'll end there. I just want you to imagine again, I'm going to pray in a minute, but the picture of Jesus at the dinner table singing these songs of celebration of people who have the promise of God whose love is everlasting and fully committed, of a God who becomes our salvation by giving himself away to break the systems of death and sin and division and brokenness, to inaugurate a new kingdom. And on that first Palm Sunday, the people lay down palm leaves in honor and expectation of his coming rule. So today, we're invited to do the same thing with our fear, our anxiety, our addictions, whatever it might be that gets in the way, taking the opportunity to return him to his place as king of our lives. But based on the promise of who God says he is, not because of how best you might be or bad you might be in your best or worst day, there are kind of limited ways of seeing ourselves. The wholeness of God's love says, this is the

king, how do you respond to him? And it tells this beautiful story of how he has responded to the brokenness and division and sin and evil in the world by defeating it.

And so we sing songs of praise, which is what we're going to do now. I'm going to pray as Greg and the band come up. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord, we bless you.

You are my God, and we will praise you. You are our God, and we will exalt you. So tonight, Lord, help us to know what it means to give thanks to you, knowing that you are good, and for each and every single one of us, your love endures forever. Amen.