

NOTES FROM RICHARD STAMP'S SERMON- 12th May 2024 am

TITLE: "God of refuge" TEXT: Psalm 118

Scripture references from the ESV

Psalm 118 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!

² Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures for ever."

³ Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures for ever."

⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures for ever."

⁵ Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free.

⁶ The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

⁷ The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

¹⁰ All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹¹ They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹² They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹³ I was pushed hard,^[a] so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.

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

¹⁵ Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly,

¹⁶ the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!"

¹⁷ I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

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

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.^[b]

²³ This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

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

²⁵ Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!

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

²⁹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!

In this increasingly frenetic, confusing and anxious world, what God's people really need to know is that, at the heart of the message of the Christian faith, we have a timelessly unchanging God who is our refuge and strength. Our God is completely in control and is ultimately victorious over every enemy and every turn of history. He is perfectly working out his perfect sovereign plan through every event in the world and every situation in our lives.

Our God is a refuge and our God is victorious

In an age with so much cultural, political and instability, where truth is considered to be relative, this 3000 year old song brings us rock-like eternal truth that we can cling to, and find refuge in, as we run to the refuge that is our God.

Psalm 118 is actually an Easter Psalm and is one of the songs of thanksgiving for God's protection and deliverance of Israel from Egypt. This particular Psalm was written to commemorate the Exodus of God's people from slavery there. Central to this was God's passing over Israel as he took the lives of the first-born sons of Egypt, from whence comes Passover. In every generation, families would sing Psalm 118 after they had eaten the Passover meal, remembering how God defeated Pharaoh through the 10 plagues and then opened up the road to safety for them through the Red Sea.

The night before Jesus was crucified, he shared the Passover meal with his disciples, so it is very likely that this Psalm was the last song Jesus would have sung that night, as they made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where later Jesus would be arrested and ultimately sent to the cross.

We read the story of what will happen to Jesus and see how he rooted himself in the solid truth that **God is good**

and God is with him (vv1, 5-9 above). Though he is hated by his enemies and forsaken by his friends yet he can hold on to these truths. As he goes to the cross, he can still sing vv8-9 because his hope and refuge is in his God.

Jesus could have chosen to pull out and go back to just being a carpenter, but that is not why he came. He came at the behest of the Father with a message of the new kingdom that was coming. He came:

- with an invitation to all (the weak, lowly and powerless) to come into relationship with God
- with the power and authority to forgive us our sins
- to heal the lame and give sight to the blind
- to demonstrate in small measure all the goodness and power of God through signs and wonders.

He came ultimately to give his life as a ransom for our sin, paying the price so that we did not have to.

He came so that we could be saved from ourselves and saved for relationship with God.

As he sang this Psalm, so he invites us to sing it with him. May we, too, sing with confidence:

His steadfast love endures for ever

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

The name of the Lord is a strong tower- the righteous run to it and are safe. If you are caught up in the turmoils of life - perhaps in personal brokenness, loss, addiction, relational storms, grief, or financial concerns – or if you are lost or in need of safety, then run to God and do not delay.

- There is safety in his name and he will protect and lead you even through the darkest valley as he walks alongside you and shepherds you home.

We can see three points about the nature of our God and the safety and victory that is to be found in him.

1. **Our God is better than any earthly king (vv8-9).** There is a challenge is at the heart of the Psalm.
- Ask yourself: where are you seeking refuge? What is your reflex action when things go wrong?

Jesus taught that **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also** (Matt 6:21) and that is what you will trust in when trials come. If your treasure is in relationships, your

own abilities or financial provision, for example, then those are the places you will run to for refuge, rather than seeking refuge in God. Those places will always lead to dissatisfaction and failure.

The Bible tells us, and we know from human experience, that no amount of money can give you eternal life. No amount of clever thinking can establish peace with God. No amount of nice clothing, food or work success can lift your depression. No government policy can cure your diseases. All those things may give temporary relief, but ultimately the problems come from maladies of the soul and so they need a soul doctor. What is needed is:

- One who knows you and understands your thoughts and struggles because he made you – a man of suffering who can sympathise with your deepest sorrow because he himself has walked the sorrowful road.
- One who did not sit in the comfort of heaven watching you in your pain, but instead came to you and entered into that pain with you
- One who has done an eternal work of establishing eternal peace, healing and salvation because he himself endured the most brutal horrors of the cross to do so for us.

Princes, politicians, advertisers, campaigners and businesses will all offer a type of salvation story. They appear to offer a way for you to achieve freedom and happiness, but they cannot solve the deepest problems of the human souls. The truth is that we are distanced from God and are in all sorts of pain. We are driven by all sorts of striving

and the only way to resolve this and find freedom, hope and salvation is by being reconciled to God by placing our trust in his Son, Jesus Christ.

There really is only one truth and one way to find freedom and peace. There is only one story, and it is

God's story. All our little stories are simply substories of the great story that he has written over your life

and over all of human history. God is working that story out day by day in your life.

Find your peace, safety and security only in God.

Find salvation only in God through faith in his Son Jesus Christ who has seen your need and taken all your sins and shame to the cross with him and nailed it there.

He has made you whole and offers you eternal life with him.

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. (vv8-9)

2. **Our God is better than any other god.** V14 is a direct quote from the song that is sung in **Exodus 15:2**, after God has closed the waters of the Red Sea over the heads of the Egyptians, destroying Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian army. It is quoted in this Psalm as a way of remembering God's power to save his people. When Moses asked Pharaoh to set the Israelites free, and Pharaoh refused, God first sent the 10 plagues before he finally took the life of Pharaoh himself. The plagues were a battle and a crushing victory over all the gods of Egypt. There was an Egyptian god for each thing affected by a plague, and Pharaoh was the greatest god of all.

God overcame all of them

This world offers us many little gods, often in the form of money, sex and power. They promise much but deliver little. These are the alluring things of the world and they are not inherently bad, provided they are kept within a biblical framework. The problem comes when you seek in them the protection, soul-satisfaction and salvation that belong only to God. If you are not careful, they will quickly enslave you.

So often we try to find things to satisfy our souls, placing those things on the throne of our hearts,

but all those things will ultimately fail us.

The only God who should be enthroned in our lives is God himself.

God made a point of overthrowing the fake gods of Egypt, as he set his people free from slavery, and we must be careful not to place ourselves back into slavery to sin and death by seeking refuge and placing our trust in things other than God.

- God has created a world full of good enjoyable things, but none of them are ultimate. God alone is ultimate.

- Do not be tempted to put your hopes and trust in all the fake gods, idols, trinkets, riches and philosophies that this world has to offer.

On that day of final escape and total victory, as the Israelites sang their song, they celebrated the removal by God of the stinging whips of the slave driver, the horses and riders of the army, all the gods of Egypt and Pharaoh himself.

- Since the beginning of human history, God has been destroying all other gods and he will be doing this until he returns in majesty and victory for his church.

Then the whole world will recognise his glory, every knee will bow and every heart will realise that he alone is the one it has been searching for.

Then every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ alone is Lord.

Refuge, deliverance and salvation are found only in God.

3. Our refuge and victory are found in the Cornerstone (v22). The cornerstone is the most important stone in the foundation of a building. Here the reference is to the cornerstone of the Temple. It is the stone that keeps the building solid, accurate and sturdy. As Jesus was on his way to the garden the night before his crucifixion, singing this Psalm, he was aware that he is the cornerstone that every life should be built on, but that has, for the moment, been rejected by the religious leaders and the people.

- Yet he also knows, and sings in confident expectation, that, despite this rejection, through his death on the cross and then his victory over death, he will become the eternal and everlasting cornerstone.
- Through his rejection, humiliation, suffering and death on the cross, he will take away the sins of the world. In that moment, he will open up the way for all time between man and God, and will make righteous every single person who says yes to him.

Through his death he has made it possible for you to become a child of God, in whom refuge is found for all eternity.

Thus the rejected stone (Christ) becomes the stone on which every other stone, and every other life, is built. When we have no cornerstone in our life, our building gets wonky. We need to establish ourselves on the cornerstone that is Christ Jesus.

- He has ransomed us from death and purchased us away from the penalty of sin
- He now holds the keys to death and Hades in his right hand for all time so he can offer you life in him now and eternal life with him in the age to come.
- He can remove you from all sorts of death at any time, just by the command of his voice
- He has overcome Egypt's Pharaoh and he overcomes every other type of Pharaoh that would seek to enslave his people.

He is the Saviour of humanity, our ultimate refuge and the cornerstone on which you can build your life

If you want to know God, and know refuge with him, then run to Jesus and place your faith in no one else. He is the strong tower of God into which we can run and be safe.

Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone.

If you are built on him, and in him, you are very, very safe.

Below is the definitive refuge passage (found in Romans 8), in the light of all God is and all that Christ has done for us on the cross. You are known and loved by God. This is what refuge and victory in God looks like in an anxious world at such a chaotic time. Take time to read and meditate on it:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? *Shall news headlines and climate change and wars and 21st century life?*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.