

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Did you know that a national day of Thanksgiving did not start in the United States? Nor did it start with the Pilgrims and Indians back when the new world was being developed and started? Actually, a national day of Thanksgiving can easily be found in the Old Testament. God incorporated a day of Thanksgiving into the worship life of His people. It was called Pentecost, or the feast of weeks. It was thanksgiving celebration for the early Spring harvest. And it was one of the three major festivals of the Jews where every male was expected to come to Jerusalem.

Not only was there this annual celebration, though. Sometimes there were also occasional thanksgiving services for specific blessings from God. One occasion when there would almost always be a thanksgiving service was after God would deliver Israel from one of her enemies. In any event, the book of Psalms, which really could be called a hymn book, we have many psalms of thanksgiving. Today we will consider one of them, Psalm 118. What makes this Psalm interesting is that it is the last in a series of Psalms that were read during the Passover celebration. Remember that the night Jesus was betrayed he was celebrating the Passover with his disciples. It's entirely possible that this was the last Psalm they read that evening. Keep that in mind as we look at it.

The point was to bring thanks to God for his many blessings. This psalm alludes to at least eight different blessings that God's people took note of and thanked Him for. The Psalm writer wanted God's people to realize that God doesn't just give you a blessing here and a blessing there. He stacks His blessings in your life so that you have many blessings all at the same time. Our cup literally overflows with God's blessings!

The psalm begins:

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
- 2 Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."
- 3 Let the house of Aaron say: "His love endures forever."
- 4 Let those who fear the LORD say: "His love endures forever."

Blessing #1 – Mercy. You've probably heard and spoken those words once or twice, haven't you? *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.* The word for love in that verse is better translated as "mercy." It means "devoted love"... that is, love, mercy and grace shown unconditionally because of a promise or covenant.

The psalm begins and ends with this call to thank God because of his enduring, undeserved, committed love and kindness for us that helps and saves us in spite of who we are and what we've done. God has bound himself to us in an unbreakable promise of love, and that alone is reason to thank him day and night.

Now we're going to be reading through this whole Psalm but before we really start into it, I would like to summarize for you the many troubles and stressful situations that the Psalmist and God's people had been in. I'd like you to do two things as we consider *their* distress. 1) Ask yourself if you have experienced or are experiencing any of these things in your life. And 2) how do these situations affect your ability to be thankful to God.

- The psalm mentions **being in anguish**. Ever felt that way? Stressed at work. Stressed at home. Dealing with a health issue, a relationship issue or a money issue... have you

ever been in anguish? Are you in anguish right now? How thankful to God are you when you are in anguish?

- “Enemies attacking” is spoken of in the Psalm. Have you ever felt under attack... at work? Or even in your own home? Have you ever felt someone has it in for you... or even worse, some people are ganging up against you? How does that affect your thankfulness?
- “being surrounded”. Ever felt trapped? Like there is no escape? Like there is no solution to your problem? You see various options in your current situation... but all of them are bad? How thankful do you feel when you’re feeling trapped?
- “being about to fall.” Can you remember the feeling you experienced when you were felt like you were going to fall from a high place. Your heart kind of leaps up into your throat and skips a few beats. We get the same feeling when we feel our life is about to crumble around us. Maybe we did something really stupid. Maybe we’re about to lose our job. Maybe we just get hit with really bad news about our health. And we feel like we’re on the edge of a cliff about to fall. How thankful can you be when you feel that way?
- “being let down by people:” Has someone you counted on ever disappointed you? Someone you trusted broke your trust? Feel like thanking God when that happens?

Can you associate with any of those things? Or maybe all of them? I bet you can. We’re all human beings and we all experience these things that rob us of thankfulness and fill us with fear. The author of this Psalm experienced these very same things... and yet he writes a psalm of thanksgiving to God! How could he do it? Let’s look at the mountain of blessings our God gives us and consider the many beautiful facets of his love and mercy.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” But how specifically?

5 In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.

6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

7 The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.

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.

Blessing #2 – Protection. *The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?* Can you picture the smallest boy in the class out on the playground with a bunch of bullies. Terrifying. Now imagine that same boy on the same playground with his 18 year old weightlifting 6’4” 220lb big brother. Not terrified, right? Now he plays in peace because his brother is there and no one will do him any harm.

That’s the image of this psalm... but you have someone much better than a gorilla of a brother standing by your side. You have God almighty, Creator of heaven and earth standing by yours side. I mean, literally, what can man do to you? You’ve got God on your side giving his protection. Knowing this, can you thank God, even when people seem to be against you? Absolutely!

Now, God hasn’t said we won’t get bumped up a bit in this life. But we won’t be afraid, because mankind can only do to us what God allows them to do to us. He will see

us through it. He will turn all out for our eternal good. He will keep our faith strong through it all.

David found that out as King Saul was trying to kill him. God's prophets found that out as kings and queens were trying to kill them. Joseph found that out when his life kept going from bad to worse... but God was in control, setting him up to be second most powerful in all of Egypt. God will take care of you and protect you so that all of your work for Him will be accomplished and your faith in Him will be secure. That's a constant.

Blessing #3 – Refuge. *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.* Let's face it, we've all been let down by people in our life, haven't we? People make promises, then break them. People seem like they're for us and they turn against us. People are sinful and imperfect. People are weak and sometimes want to keep a promise but are unable. But our God is mighty and reliable. He keeps all his promises. And he is powerful to make good on every one of them. In times of distress turn to him. He is the perfect refuge in times of trouble.

10 All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

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

12 They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

Blessing #4 – Strength. *All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off.* A high school class was studying Greek mythology. The teacher assigned a hero of Greek mythology to each member of the class, and the student had to defend his hero as the best of them all. One member of the class really struggled. His "hero" didn't seem like much of a hero. He didn't have great strength. He couldn't move quickly. He finally asked his teacher why his "hero" was even included in the first place. The teacher simply said, "you must remember that very often true strength and the ability to accomplish great things does not come from yourself – it's how you make use of other people, your supporting cast."

You and I don't have much strength. But in the name of the Lord... in the name of the Lord we have great strength and can accomplish many things. God is our strength. Even when we are weak, we know that He will always remain strong. God stacks that blessing on top of the others.

13 I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me.

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

Blessing #5 – Rescue. *I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.* Being pushed back and about to fall on the battle line meant that you were about to be killed. That explains the absolute elation in the words that followed, doesn't it? God had continually come to his *rescue* to help him survive another day. But he even expanded his joy by saying that God had become his salvation. God had rescued him in more ways than on the battle field. Did you catch what he said? God wasn't just the guy who rescued him, but God indeed was his salvation. From beginning to end and everything in between, God was the one to rescue him from every dangerous situation – body and soul. God gives us the same blessing,

doesn't He? He is not just the guy who gets us out of sticky situations sometimes with our boss or when we are driving in our cars, but He is our salvation from start to finish and he will rescue us from the dangerous situations in life – especially the ones that are dangerous to our soul. Thank God!

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.

Blessing #6 – Chastening. *The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.* Praise the Lord! Thank God! The psalm doesn't leave us guessing why we should do those things. It's because of what the Lord has done. The Lord has protected, been a refuge, given strength, and rescued. We can't praise God or thank him, without first remembering his works... all he has done for us.

Verse 18 tells us: “The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.” Thank God... that he has chastened (disciplined) me?! That was the psalmist's way of saying that the Lord loved him so much that it sometimes literally hurt. God wasn't going to let sin and sinful temptations get the best of him so the Lord allowed some bad things to happen to help him turn away from sin and stay close to the Lord. We know what that blessing feels like, don't we? Sometimes the way that God keeps us close to him and the way that He keeps us focused on him and on heaven really hurts. But we know that it's for our good. As a loving parent disciplines his children so the Lord keeps refining us into the godly people He wants us to be and to keep us all the more closer to Him in our life.

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.

Blessing #7 – Answers to prayer. *I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.* Did you know that God does not answer everybody's prayer? Does that sound strange? It's true. Sinful people cannot just approach a holy God and expect that their prayers will be even heard, much less answered. But believers in Jesus Christ have no sin on their record, do they? They come before God holy and blameless through faith. God says that He will always hear and answer our prayers for Jesus' sake. The psalmist knew that and counted on it. You can count on God answering every one of your prayers in the best ways possible so that everything works out for your eternal good. God will never take that away. Another amazing blessing to thank God for!

As we read the final verses of the Psalm, I want you to remember once more, that it is possible, even likely, that Jesus read this Psalm with his disciples at the Passover celebration the night he was betrayed. Imagine Jesus reading these words to his disciples.

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.

Blessing #8 – Jesus. *The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.* The blessing spoken of in this verse, is “the stone the builders rejected who has become the capstone.” Jesus was rejected by the Jews of his day – even to the point of putting him to death on a cross. To them he was like a stone not fit to be used in a building project. But Jesus became the capstone... the most important stone in the structure. At his death on the cross, Jesus took full responsibility for our sins and paid their horrible penalty. In Christ, our guilt is gone and we have complete forgiveness. Jesus is the blessing from which all other blessings flow.

Today on this national day of Thanksgiving, thank God for all of those blessings He so freely and generously gives you – blessings of body and soul.

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