

# Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – April 14, 2019

## Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the NRSV on biblegateway.com.)

### Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

### Commentary on Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

(From *Homiletics*; “The Navel of Our World”, April 1, 2012)

Psalm 118 is an obvious choice for Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday preaching: Followers of Jesus Christ find Psalm 118 echoed by Jesus' life and suffering/death, and even by his (and our) resurrection. Verse 26a ("Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD") is cited by all four gospels (Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:8-9, Luke 19:37-38, John 12:13) in depicting Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Jesus himself cites verses 22-23 ("The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone....") in Matthew 21:42 (cf. Mark 12:10-11, Luke 20:17) -- see below. Peter cites verse 22 in Acts 4:10-11. Verse 27 speaks of a "festal procession with branches" (see Matthew 21:8-9, Mark 11:8-9, John 12:12-13). And the praise-filled "Hosanna!" of Matthew 21:9 and John 12:13 comes from the transliterated Greek form of verse 25a's Hebrew *hoshi'ah na'* ("Save [us] now," or "Please save [us]"). God has become the psalmist's salvation (vv. 14, 21).

Psalm 118, a psalm of praise which gives thanks to the Lord for that deliverance, concludes a group of hymnic psalms of praise (Psalms 113-118) known as "Hallel psalms" or "Egyptian Hallel psalms" (see 114:1). They have found use in Jewish celebrations of the yearly pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16, Mark 14:26): Passover/Unleavened Bread, Weeks/Pentecost, and Shelters/Booths/Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). Psalm 118 is associated with this last festival. And it is sandwiched between the shortest and longest chapters of the Bible.

The first and last verses of Psalm 118 (vv. 1 and 29) are bookends with identical exuberant words: "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, (for) his steadfast love endures forever." The psalmist declares, "[The LORD] is good" (*tov*), meaning that he holds God in highest esteem, as one whose qualities are to be desired. "Steadfast love" in Hebrew is *hesed* (vv. 1-4, 29), translated variously: "steadfast love" by NRSV and *Tanakh*; "love" by NIV, TEV and NAB; "loving kindness" by NASB; "mercy" by KJV; "faithful love" by NJB and NLT; and "loyal love" by NET. *Hesed* can be understood as covenant loyalty, graciousness and kindness. God honors his covenants with us human beings, sometimes even when we breach them. Be sure to include verses 2-4 with verse 1, as they provide an intensification via the various groups' repetition of "[H]is steadfast love endures forever." See Psalms 107:1, 117:1-2, and especially 136 (all); 1 Chronicles 16:34, 2 Chronicles 5:13, Ezra 3:11.

Note the *joy* throughout the psalm, in its pervasive mood and explicit words (vv. 15, 24). Often used as a call to worship or as a spirited chorus, verse 24 reads, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (or "in *him*," the NRSV's alternate translation of the Hebrew). "[B]e glad in *him*" is at least as good a translation as "[B]e glad in *it*," given the emphasis on thanksgiving (vv. 1, 19, 21, 28, 29) to *the LORD* for taking action in bringing about "today's" victory. In celebrating their annual festivals, the king and the people trust in the Lord God to reactivate his saving victory in their lives. The *LORD* is God, and the LORD is the *psalmist's* God (vv. 27a; 28). The name of the God of Israel (YHWH/Yahweh or Yah/"The LORD") appears 28 times in 29 verses.

Verses 22-23 speak of the people's finding the Lord's provision of "the stone" to be marvelous (wonderful/amazing). In its original OT context the meaning of verse 22 ("The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone") is uncertain. Bratcher and Reyburn (*A Handbook on Psalms*, 993) mention that some scholars consider this to be a proverbial expression which is applied here to the king. "He had been near defeat and death, but now Yahweh has granted him victory and success.... Others take the stone to represent Israel, rejected as unimportant by the great empires.... In later times Judaism applied this verse not only to the king but also the expected Messiah, an interpretation adopted by the Christian church." Jesus cites verses 22-23 in Matthew 21:42 (cf. Mark 12:10-11, Luke 20:17). The apostle Peter cites verse 22 in Acts 4:10-11. From NT times, Christians have seen connections between Psalm 118:22-23 and the initial rejection and suffering of Jesus, followed by his subsequent vindication when God raised him from the dead. And because he lives, we may live; Christians are heartened by verse 17's "I shall not die, but I shall live...." See Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45 for another passage about a God-given stone, which is also interpreted messianically, as is Daniel 7:9, 13-14.

Ephesians 2:19-22 calls Jesus Christ ἀκρογωνία (v. 20: the corner, cornerstone, capstone or keystone), which corresponds to Psalm 118:22's *rosh pinnah* (literally "the head of the corner"). Similarly, Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14-15 are cited loosely by Romans 9:33. See also 1 Peter 2:4-10. Isaiah 28:16 reads: "[T]herefore thus says the Lord GOD. See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'One who trusts will not panic.'" We can trust Jesus Christ, the center of our life.

Since it is the Lord alone who can bring deliverance and victory, Psalm 118 urges placing our trust in the Lord rather than either placing our ultimate trust in human beings or fearing them. Notice the parallels and contrasts in verses 8 and 9 ("put confidence in" (from *batah*, to trust) is in parallel to "take refuge in" the LORD). And see Psalms 40:4, 146:3; Isaiah 2:22, 7:9b; 30:2, 15-18; 31:1; 36:6; Jeremiah 17:5. Although they are not part of the lectionary reading, be sure to read verses 5-18 (not just vv. 8-9), as they are the context for the thanksgiving to the Lord for his salvation in the rest of the Psalm. Verse 14 says, "The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation" (and see vv. 21 and 25).

The gates of righteousness (vv. 19-20) are those of the temple, where only the godly righteous may enter (Psalm 15 (all), Psalm 24:3-10, Matthew 25:31). According to *The Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (article 1879), righteousness is living by God's right, moral and ethical standards in relationship to others, which includes mercy for the needy and helpless, along with equal justice for all in legal matters. Righteousness can also mean the saving vindication of God. Hence we see varied translations of 118:19: "Gates of righteousness" (NRSV, NIV, NASB), "Gates of victory" (*Tanakh*, NAB), "Gates of saving justice" (NJB).

Significantly, verse 26a's "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD" is cited in *all four* gospels (Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:8-9, Luke 19:37-38, John 12:13): Jesus' disciples and the crowds shouted it out as he entered Jerusalem that final time. Originally, "the one who comes in the name of the LORD" may have referred to the king who entered the temple as one who represented the Lord and the deliverance he brings. By the time of Jesus, the expression is understood in Judaism in a messianic way, and thus applied in the gospels to Jesus, who calls us to bear our cross daily (Luke 9:23) on the way to eternal hope. We may trust him along the way.

## Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

## Reflection Questions on Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

1. As noted in the commentary above, v. 26a's "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD" is cited in all four gospels as the phrase shouted by the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. From our vantage point then, these words clearly applied to Jesus in messianic expectation. But what of their original intent? Is messianic expectation their original meaning? Or is there something else to which they point?
2. The commentary above lists numerous other scriptures that quote or allude to this Psalm, parallel it, etc. including Jesus quoting it himself. Spend some time exploring these various scriptural connections. What additional insights or questions do these connection generate?
3. This text is the featured Psalm on both Psalm Sunday and Easter Sunday in most lectionaries. Given their place on either side of Holy Week, how do you feel about this Psalm as a bookend for Holy Week? Consider its content, its mood, its allusions and traditional associations...

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you "wonder" about when reading these passages?**