**GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD**

October 12, 2014

Psalm 118:1-29

Key Verse 118:1 “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Happy Thanksgiving! The first use of “Thanksgiving” in English text occurs in a 1533 translation of the Bible and is intended as an act of giving thanks to God. In 19th century Canadians observed the Thanksgiving day to celebrate the end of war or the end of a monarch’s struggle with sickness. For example, on April 5, 1872, Canadians observed the Thanksgiving day to celebrate the recovery of the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) from a serious illness. The early Thanksgiving celebrations occurred at periodic intervals and never on an annual basis.By the mid-19th century, members of the Ontario clergy wanted to formalize the holiday as a religious event, as a means to thank God. They successfully lobbied the Canadian government to create Canada’s first, national Thanksgiving in 1859. Starting in 1879 Thanksgiving Day was observed every year, but the date was proclaimed annually and changed year to year. Then on January 31, 1957, the Canadian Parliament proclaimed: “A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed…to be observed on the 2nd Monday in October.”Thanksgiving Day in Canada has a clear spiritual meaning. We should give thanks to God for his goodness and mercy to us in spite of all of our sins. However, due to the influence of secular humanism and commercialism, the meaning of this great day has been perverted into just long weekend. As we study Psalm 118 today, may we learn a spirit of thanksgiving to God! The book of Psalms can be called the hymn book of Israel. Psalms were often part of Jewish worship. This particular Psalm was sung during the Feast of Tabernacle. Many theologians say that this psalm was sung by Jesus and his disciples after the last supper. This Psalm encourages us to give thanks to God and explains why we should give thanks to God.

Look at verse 1. “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” Giving thanks is our right response to God’s goodness and love. True thanksgiving wells up when we recognize who God is. The Psalmist urges us to turn away from our problems and concerns and to look at God. We should not focus on our petty problems in our pilgrim’s journey but focus on God’s love and grace. When we behold God’s goodness, we can thank God from our hearts. Psalm 118 is a chorus of praise. In each verse, the soloist sings the first part, and the choir sings the second part. So when I say, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,” then say, “his love endures forever.”

George Washington led the whole nation to thank God in his 1789 proclamation: “Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor…therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country…And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually…” When the leader of a nation leads his nation to give thanks to God, God blesses the whole nation. Let’s pray that God may help our leaders, especially Prime Minister Stephen Harper, to give thanks to God for his mercy and grace.

Look at verse 3. “Let the house of Aaron say: ‘His love endures forever.’” The house of Aaron refers to the priests. They had a special privilege from God to dwell in the house of the Lord, handle the word of God, and conduct the temple worship. This was God’s great love for them. They should confess that God loved them. St. Peter said that all Christians are royal priests (1 Pet 2:9). In a sense, each Christian is a priest and a missionary. We have a great privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus with a lost world, especially at the University of Toronto. Let’s pray continuously for many U of T students to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and declare his praises. Look at verse 4. “Let those who fear the Lord say: ‘His love endures forever.’” God’s love goes far beyond Israel and the priests. God loves everyone, and God blesses everyone who fears the Lord. Thank God for his enduring love.

Then what should we be thankful for?

Firstly, thank God for answered prayer (5-9) Look at verse 5. “In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free.” The Psalmist experienced anguish personally. He was in terrible situation. What did he do in a desperate situation? In his anguish, he cried out to the Lord. Psalm 119:147 says, “I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.” He came out to the presence of God and cried out. Often times King David wet his pillows with tears of prayers. Someone said, “Prayer is the way to heaven and praise is heaven itself.” Prayer connects us to God daily. The joy of faith lies in answered prayer. Did God answer your prayers? God answers our prayers in his way. Sometimes it takes time but he answers our prayers.

Look at verse 6. “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” The Psalmist knew that the Lord was with him in all circumstances of life and based on this conviction, he was not afraid of troubles caused by man. Jesus’ last word for his disciples was “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b) When Jesus was with his disciples, they were not afraid of men and preached the gospel message boldly and they changed world history. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:31, “What, then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” Nobody will be against us. Based on this assurance, Apostle Paul preached the gospel fearlessly and he became one of the powerful tent-making missionaries in the first century. When the Lord is with us, what can man do to us? Dr. John Lee in Springfield, IL serves God diligently. Then his boss told him that he spent too much time in doing God’s work, and that he should find another hospital to work. Let’s pray for Dr. John to stand firm and believe this promise, “The Lord is with me; What can man do to me?”

Look at verse 7. “The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.” The Psalmist confessed that God was his helper. Our life is victorious because God is our helper. Look at verses 8-9. “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.” Isaiah 2:22 says, “Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?” I do not mean that you stop trusting in your parents or friends. I mean that we have to trust God. Many women are betrayed by their prince charming because they do not trust God. Some students trust their friends more than God, and so when their study group meets on Sunday, they go to the study group rather than coming to the worship service, trusting God. Who do you trust more, prince charming or God Almighty? It is better to take refuge in God. He is our Rock and Refuge. We can trust God because he answers to our cry for help always.

Secondly, thank God for giving us strength and joy (10-16). Look at verses 10-12. “All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off. 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.” The Psalmist was very poetic to describe his situation. The adversity is likened to “all the nations” that “surrounded him” and “swarmed around like bees.” Then he said, “they died out as quickly as burning thorns.” What was the secret of his quick victory? The threefold repetition of “In the name of the Lord” and the phrase “I cut them off” together demonstrate that the Lord’s name was sufficiently powerful to defeat his enemies. Gideon was a man of fear. But when God was with him, he was able to cut off Baal altar and built the altar to God. He delivered the Israelites from the hands of his enemies. David was just a shepherd boy when he faced Goliath--a 9 feet tall giant with full armor. But he said, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel.” David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord God Almighty and triumphed over him with a sling and a stone. In the name of the Lord, David cut off Goliath’s head and delivered the Israelites from his enemies. In our spiritual battle we have to rely on the name of the Lord. Then we will win many spiritual victories.

Look at verse 13. “I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me.” The adversity was so great that the Psalmist felt himself pushed and was “about to fall.” Even though we have God’s strength, we will face moments of vulnerability. At that time, the Lord helps us. Look at verse 14. “The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” In the final analysis, it is the Lord alone who gives victory to his people. The Lord is our strength. The Lord is our song. Because the Lord fights for us, we can have joy and victory. Look at verse 15. “Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: ‘The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!’” Let’s remember God’s victories in the past one year and rejoice with songs of victory and praise.

Thirdly, thank God for chastening that leads to righteousness (17-21). Look at verse 17. “I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done.” The Psalmist’s struggle was very intense, a matter of life and death. Look at verse 18. “The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.” Missionary Timothy Park is going through the trial of faith in his battle against Leukemia. However, as this passage shows that he will not die, but will live and proclaim God’s grace in his life. God brings his people through hard trials for his own glory. St. Peter told early Christians to greatly rejoice in such trials because their faith was purified and they could give glory to God (1 Pet 1:7). God used painful trial to help us grow spiritually and give glory to God.

Fourthly, thank God for Jesus Christ, the capstone. Look at verses 22-23. “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” This verse is quoted five times in the New Testament (Mt. 21:42, Mk 12:10,11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7) By the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist praised God for the coming Messiah as the capstone. Here the capstone or the cornerstone pointed to Jesus, the Messiah. The capstone holds the building together. When Jesus came into this world as the Lamb of God, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not acknowledge him as the Messiah. They rejected him and crucified him on the cross. They rejected him as the Son of God. They thought that Jesus was unfit to their spiritual house. Jesus was rejected by men but God raised him up from the dead and used him to build the kingdom of God and open the way for us to have eternal life in the kingdom of God. Jesus became the foundation of our salvation. It is marvelous in our eyes. Jesus became the capstone for our salvation. Look at verse 24. “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Even in the midst of trials, we can rejoice and be glad in it because of God’s marvelous grace in Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 25-28. “O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.” In verses 25-28, the Psalmist pictures people assembled for the coming of the Messiah welcoming him into the temple. This was fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem in the triumphal entry. After entering to Jerusalem, Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. We will all gather to welcome him and shout in victory, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

In conclusion, the Psalmist confessed very personally, “God is my help, my strength, my song, my salvation, and my God.” I pray that you may experience God’s enduring love and his goodness throughout your life. Let’s thank God and offer songs of joy to him alone.