

Christ the Cornerstone

Psalm 118:17-29

Halifax: 15 July 2007

Introduction:

As most of you know,

- it has become our practice at Covenant Reformed to have what we call a Psalm of Focus.
- The Psalm of Focus is a Psalm that we sing every Sunday for several weeks so that we can learn it well...
 - It is selected because it relates to our regular sermon series.
 - And, whenever we take up a new Psalm of Focus,
 - I take a break from our regular sermon series to preach from that Psalm.

Today, I am breaking from our series in Matthew to introduce Psalm 118-C (as it is designated in our Psalter).

- Psalm 118-C covers the last part of Psalm 118, verses 17-29.
 - In our Matthew sermon series we have just now been looking at our Lord's suffering and death, and for that we sang Psalm 118-B...
 - But now we are coming to look at His resurrection and establishment as Lord and Saviour of His Church...
 - and as you will soon see, Psalm 118-C has very much to say about this!
 - especially when we understand it as a covenant song.
- By a covenant Song, I mean a song that God has given to His people collectively, the church as a whole, to sing to Him...
 - We need to understand in singing Psalms that Christ is the Head of the Church and so is the one that calls us together to sing praise to God...
 - And as He made Himself one of us in order that He might redeem us, the Psalms are in particular His songs...
 - And because we belong to Him as His subjects, they are our songs—ours and Christ's.
 - It is because of our unity with Him (as subjects of His kingdom—as part of His body the church),
 - He is so closely associated with us that He can sing about our sins as His own sins and plead for their cleansing...

- And we can sing about His righteousness and claim what is promised to that righteous because His righteousness is imputed to us.
- In other words, we are one with Him and He is one with us.
 - Because of our oneness with Him, He has suffered for our sins and we have received His favour!
 - If we were not joined to Him, we would be eternally lost...
 - If He were not joined to us, He would never have had to suffer...
 - But we are joined to Him and He to us, so now we can sing these covenant songs **together** as a body that is sinful, but also as a body that has now been made righteous.
 - None of you are that by yourself...
 - But that is what you are in Jesus Christ.
 - By faith, you have become sharers in His victory over sin and death...
 - And it is of that glorious salvation that you sing when you sing Psalm 118-C

This morning I want to look at the content of our song when we sing Psalm 118-C with our Saviour:

- Of what do we sing when we sing Psalm 118:17-29?

I. First, see how we sing of the great turn around in our situation.

A. Oh Church of Jesus Christ (I speak of the whole church collectively—all of God's elect people from the beginning of the world until its end)...

- Oh Church of Jesus Christ, what a mess you were in!
 - Look what these verses suggest about your former condition...
- 1. Verse 17-18 shows that you were on the brink of death...
 - a. God's severe chastisement was upon you and it threatened to deliver you over to eternal death—
 - eternal death, where you would never be able to declare the works of the LORD...
 - eternal death, where you would be forever cut off with the joy of knowing your God and of living unto Him as you were made to do...
 - eternal death, in which you would be shut up forever to the boredom of life without His bountiful blessing that alone gives true happiness.

- b. You had broken God's law,
 - Your sin was a stench in His nostrils...
 - You were loathsome and unclean, and altogether unworthy of His company.
 - You were guilty of rebellion against the One who is worthy of all glory—everything about you was wrong.
2. Verse 19-20 imply that the gates of righteousness were shut up against you...
- a. Because of your unrighteousness,
 - You could not go into the presence of the LORD to behold His beauty in His sanctuary
 - You could not go before Him to pray to Him for your food, for the grace you need to live a life of beauty, for deliverance from your adversaries, for happiness.
 - b. The gates of righteousness were closed forever against you—
 - you were shut in the prison of death and darkness...blind to His glory and unable to live for it
 - you were shut out by God's curse, condemned to misery and suffering...
 - you were shut up to your own corruption, to continue in your sinful ways forever—to go on in your selfishness and your lack of love toward God.
3. And look at verse 22—there is your head—a rejected stone...
- a. There is the One who represents you—your king, your head, your chief...
 - there He is, rejected by the builders of the church...
 - there He is, delivered up by them to be crucified...
 - there He is, bearing the curse of the you all, Church of God, rejected by heaven and earth on the cross!
 - See heaven's judgement closed in upon Him in those hours of darkness upon the cross.
 - See Him crying out,
 - “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken Me!”
 - b. There is the One who was your very last hope!
 - See what your sins have done to Him!
 - They have brought even Him to the brink of death...
 - They have shut up the gates of righteousness even to Him...
 - They have caused Him to be rejected by heaven and earth.

TRANS> Oh Church of Jesus Christ, what a mess you were in when the Son of God came from heaven to redeem you!

B. But look—you have already seen it in these verses—look at the marvellous turn around in your condition, Oh Church!

- Look at the marvellous turn around that occurred when Jesus came!

1. He speaks for you all—all who belong to Him by faith in Him—when He says:

- v. 17-18: “I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord. The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death!”

a. You will say, “but He did die.”

- But I say, “no, He did not die,” that is, He did not **stay** dead...

- He was not given over to death to be kept by death.

- He did not die eternally so that He was cut off from God forever...

- No, God raised Him up from the dead!

- He did not allow Him to see corruption.

b. Indeed, our sin brought Him down to the grave,

- but even all that load of sin could not keep Him there...

- His righteousness prevailed—

- God the Father accepted His sacrifice because He was righteous.

- And even though He still represents us with all our corruption,

- He now lives forever in the glorious presence of God and death cannot have Him.

c. Hear the wonderful words He says to you, O Church—all of you who believe:

- John 11:25-26: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

- He does not mean that you will never die physically—you will—

- but He means you will never die eternally—so as to be forever cut off from beholding the glory of God and living for the glory of God...

- That means that because of Him, you who believe can sing these words in Psalm 118:17:

- “I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me, but He has not given me over to death.”
 - In the same way that He was brought to the brink of eternal death because of your sins,
 - so you are brought from death to life because of Him!
 - What a marvellous turn around for the church!
2. And so it is with the gates of righteousness!
- a. The LORD Jesus stands at the head of the whole church before the gates of righteousness that lead to the Father’s throne and declares with boldness,
 - “Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them and I will praise the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous shall enter.”
 - He does not speak for Himself alone,
 - He speaks as the Head and representative of all His people!
 - He orders that the gates be opened for us all so that we can enter into God’s presence and commune with Him forever!
 - b. But how can we who are unrighteous enter the gates of righteousness that are only for the righteous?
 - Well what is it to be righteous?
 - A righteous person is someone who has done all that is required by the law.
 - And church, you have now done all that is required of you—you have paid double for all your sins—
 - because Jesus Christ has come to you and He has met all of God’s demands for the whole church...
 - He omitted nothing...
 - By faith in Him, you can enter the gates of righteousness and come to God because you **are** righteous.
 - Jesus has omitted nothing, and the gates have been flung open at His call for Him and for all of those He represents!

TRANS> What a marvellous turn around—You were shut out, but now you can draw near—

- you can come through those gates with confidence because Jesus Christ has made the way!
 - He is the way, the truth and the life...
 - It is by Him that you can come to the Father...

3. But verse 22 presents Him as a rejected stone...
 - a. It says that the builders rejected Him...
 - The builders were the leaders of the church that God appointed to govern the church...
 - And their official verdict was that Jesus must be crucified...
 - 1) And as God's spokesmen, they were very right about that...
 - When our sins were laid on His account,
 - He had to be cursed for us—
 - He had to die on the cross—
 - He had to shed His blood as a propitiation for our sins...
 - They did nothing but pronounce the verdict of heaven against Him when He was charged with our sins.
 - As we saw last week, the very heavens were darkened when the Father's frown fell upon His Son,
 - and He cried out that He had been forsaken!
 - 2) Even our glorious Head who Himself was without sin when He became our representative was brought to this grief...
 - His rejection by the builders, as unrighteous as that rejection was, was just what the Father had decreed concerning Him as our sin bearer...
 - It was God's will that Jesus be rejected for our sake.
 - This in no way justifies the builders who rejected Him,
 - but it in every way glorifies God who gave up His Son to pay the penalty of our sins...
 - and it glorifies the Son who willingly became our sin bearer and redeemer.
- b. But here is the great turn around!
 - 1) The builders rejected Him because they falsely charged Him with unrighteousness...
 - God the Father rejected Him as the One who was bearing our unrighteousness...
 - He was receiving Him as an offering for our sins...
 - 2) But after He had offered Himself,
 - the Father then made Him the chief cornerstone of the whole church!
 - The whole church is built on this One foundation...

- It is Jesus, but His suffering and death, that sanctifies the whole building...
- Otherwise, we are cut off!
- The builders rejected Him, but the Father has accepted Him.
- By raising Him from the dead,
 - He declared plainly that Jesus had done all that was required to reconcile the church to Him forever!

3) What a complete turn around!

- No wonder it says,
 - “This was the LORD’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes!”
- a) All that rejection and scorn that was poured on Him was the rejection and scorn that we deserve, O Church!
 - Who else could have so wonderfully found a way to take away such sin?
 - Who else could have the ability to take away such sin?
 - Who else would be so gracious as to do it in this way?
 - What a marvellous turn around in our condition!
 - What a heavy load has been lifted from every member of the church!
- b) How marvellous it is in the eyes of all of you who have come to Jesus to receive this marvellous deliverance!
 - What a change God has worked for you!
 - Let it sink in what He has done!
 - Behold and marvel my brothers and sisters...
 - By Jesus our redeemer,
 - the whole church was brought from death to life...
 - the gates of righteousness were opened to us...
 - and the rejected stone was made the head of the corner!

TRANS> What a marvellous turn around!

- It is of this turn-around that we sing in Psalm 118-C.
 - That is the first thing of which we sing...
 - Now I want you to consider the second.

II. Second, see how in this song, you who are redeemed, respond to the great turn around that God has brought about for you!

A. First, there is the promise to praise God for what He has done!

- Four times a resolution is made that you will praise Him because of this marvellous saving work.

1. The first resolution is found in v. 17:

- Here you promise that you will declare His works because He has delivered you from death...
 - Indeed, declaring God's works is really what life is!
 - If you aren't declaring the greatness of God, you are, according to the Bible, **dead!**
 - According to the Bible, life is not just existence...
 - those who have entered the second death will still exist—they will still be very conscious—but they will be even deader than they were before.
 - You are only alive, according the God's word, when you are living unto God—
 - Life is having communion with Him!
 - Life is seeing His glory and beauty and praising Him!
 - Life is receiving His grace to live a life that is reflective of Him—not the ugly life of sin that we live in this world.
 - Life is receiving of His bounty, those things that fill us with joy and gladness.
 - So when you don't die, but live as it says in verse 17,
 - it means that you declare the works of God—you are no longer dead to Him—you are alive to see and to receive and to declare!

TRANS> So the first resolution is that you will live and declare God's works...

2. Then second resolution to praise God is found in verse 21:

- This time, it's a promise to praise the LORD for answering us...
 - answering us when we asked Him to open the gates of righteousness to us!
- As we have seen, Jesus is the one who opened those gates and the One who leads the church through them by His merit...
 - But if you are in Christ, you have joined your prayers to His...
 - You have seen that you have no righteousness,
 - but you have asked God to open the gates to you because of Jesus...

- You have asked Him to pardon your sins so that you can come before Him...
 - to let you draw near through the blood of Christ, sacrificed for you.
- And God has answered you!
 - That is a prayer that He always answers.
 - And so now that you can enter His courts,
 - you are promising that you will do so with praise...
 - “I will praise you for you have answered me and have become my salvation.”
3. The third resolution to praise Him is in verse 24—
- a. After realising the marvellous way that God took the rejected stone and made Him the foundation of the whole church...
 - Verse 24 says,
 - “This is the day that the LORD has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.”
 - b. This is a reference to the Christian Sabbath! the Lord’s Day.
 - 1) In the beginning, God laid the foundation of the earth...
 - The earth was created to be a sanctuary of praise to Him where He was known and loved and worshipped by man,
 - And it was to be a place where we were constantly enriched by His grace and by His bounty.
 - God finished that work in six days, and rested on the seventh day.
 - Therefore, the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it...
 - He made it a day for us—a day for us to rejoice and be glad in His finished work.
 - But we did not rejoice in His work...
 - Instead, we spoiled His creation by sin which brought death upon our whole race...
 - It cut us off from life with God.
 - We fell into the mess that I spoke about at the beginning of this sermon—
 - the mess we were in before God turned us around...
 - on the brink of death
 - shut out of God’s presence by the gates of righteousness

- and a proper object of scorn under God's curse
- 2) But when Jesus, the rejected stone, was raised from death,
- that was when a new foundation was laid...
 - the foundation of a new heaven and a new earth!
 - The foundation of earth and heaven redeemed to live again!
 - And you know that He was raised on the first day of the week!
 - Now there was a new day that completely overshadowed the old day!
 - A new day that God has made for us to rejoice and be glad.
 - This new foundation was laid in Christ Jesus on the first day of the week,
 - so God consecrated the first day of the week and made it holy.
 - The New Testament tells us that Jesus met with His disciples on the first day repeatedly and that He as last poured out His spirit on the first day...
 - And then we are told that it was the churches the apostles set up gathered on the first day of the week to break bread.
 - It is a day for us—a day for us to rejoice and be glad—
 - a day for us to remember what Christ has done for us...
 - a day for us to remember how He makes all things new for us...
 - a day for us to rejoice in how He turned everything around!
- c. And so you see that there is a resolution that is made concerning this day—this great day when Jesus was made the chief cornerstone...
- The resolution is this:
 - “This is the day which the Lord had made, we will rejoice and be glad in it!”
 - Brothers and sisters, this is what you promise to do in Christ!
 - It is not enough to worship Him privately...
 - He calls us together in the great assembly:
 - to declare to us what He has done (by the preaching of the word)

- and for us to give thanks to His name!
 - The Lord's Day is not a day for fasting—it is a day to rejoice and be glad...
 - Let nothing be allowed to overshadow your joy on the Lord's Day.
 - Rejoice and be glad in it!
 - There are plenty of other days for fasting, but the Lord's Day is for feasting and for reverent celebration before our God.
 - If you are not able to set aside a day to celebrate what God has done,
 - I have to wonder if you are even a partaker of this glorious salvation!
 - How could you and not be filled with joy?
4. The fourth resolution to praise Him comes at the end...
- or almost at the end—in verse 28...
 - It says:
 - v. 28: “You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You.”
 - a. Before Jesus came and turned everything around for you, Church of God, God was not really your God...
 - Oh yes, He was still our Creator and our Judge—He was our God in that sense,
 - but we were cut off from the communion that we were created to have with Him...
 - we were cut off from what I have spoken about already...
 - a relationship in which we know Him, see His beauty, love Him, declare His glory from a heart overflowing with adoration...
 - a relationship in which we receive His grace to fill our lives with virtue, with love for each other, with true wisdom, with beauty... and with all good things to enjoy.
 - b. But when Jesus came and turned everything around for us, God became our God again!
 - The ancient promise made to Abraham when God first came to him and said, “I will be your God” was fulfilled!
 - God became our God through Jesus Christ!

- And my friends, to have God as your God is to have everything! absolutely everything good!
 - There is nothing to be compared to it!
 - You can never be deficient of a thing with Him as your God!
 - He is bringing us into the fullness of that relationship of which we have the beginnings now if we are in Christ!

- c. And this is the reason, according to v. 28 for us to praise and exalt Him...
 - It is time to start doing what you were made to do now that you have Him as your God...
 - Give Him the glory due to His name!
 - I know you don't have it in you yet to do all that you ought...
 - God is at work in you and His work will not be complete until the last day—the great day of judgement...
 - But if He has become your God through Christ,
 - Let the praise begin...
 - Present your whole life to Him as a living sacrifice because He is your God...
 - As Paul says in Romans 12:
 - Romans 12:1-2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."
 - What that means is that everything you do is to be done for Him...
 - Your work on Tuesday afternoon is to be for Him...
 - Your recreation on Friday night is to be for Him...
 - Your worship on Sunday is to be for Him...
 - Your time with your children is to be for Him...
 - Your relationship with your spouse is to be for Him...
 - Your money is all for Him—you are a steward who is to manage it...
 - Every thing is to be consecrated to Him because He is your God.
 - This is your reasonable service when you consider what He has done.

TRANS> And so you see that the response of this Psalm to the great turn around that God has wrought for you is a commitment to praise the LORD.

- But surely when you have seen this work,
 - when you have truly grasped something of the greatness of this salvation...
 - You will want others to see it and join you in the praise...
 - You will be just like the person who is excited about his favourite hockey team—he wants to tell everyone about it—
 - He wants to draw in others who are not fans, and he wants to stir up those who are...
- B. And so you see in verse 25 that there is an earnest supplication put forth to God that He will save others...
1. Now that Christ has accomplished this great saving work... the prayer is:
 - “Save now (the word is Hosanna)...
 - “Save now I pray O Lord; O Lord send now prosperity.”
 - a. This is only natural, is it not?
 - When you see the great turn around that God has wrought for His people, you naturally want Him to turn everyone around!
 - You say, in effect,
 - “O LORD, now that Jesus has accomplished so great a redemption for the sin of the world,
 - apply that redemption to the world!
 - redeem the world!
 - save the world!
 - send out your gospel to bring the whole world to salvation!”
 - b. If you have grasped what He has done for you,
 - you will surely want to see Him do it for your spouse, for your children, for your parents, for your neighbours and your friends...
 - for all the nations of the world!
 2. And you will not only pray that outsiders will be brought in, but that the church that is already established would flourish...
 - The second part of the prayer is “send now prosperity”
 - That we, God’s redeemed people, would be filled with the joy and the fruits that belong to this glorious salvation.
 - That we would be visibly changed, that the beauty of the LORD would be seen upon us.
 - It will pain you that the church is not more ardent in her praise and that so many are yet to be gathered to her.

TRANS> So your response to God's work is first a resolution that you will praise Him, and secondly an earnest prayer that others will praise Him also...

- And too your prayer that will be added a third thing that has to do with promoting the praise of God...

C. In verse 26, you pronounce your blessing upon the one who comes in the name of the LORD...

1. The One who comes in the name of the LORD is the one who is sent to do His business...

- He is the prophet whom God sends to speak in His name...
- He is the priest who comes to offer sacrifices in His name...
- He is the king who comes to govern in His name.

- And because you who know God's salvation delight in the Lord...
 - You delight in His work that has turned everything around for you...
 - You count as blessed the one who comes in His name...
 - and in particular, the one who above all others was sent to do His business...
 - even Jesus Christ, the Messiah.
 - You can not be saved unless you bless Him—unless you come to see how blessed He is—how full of light and grace and salvation...
 - You must come to delight in Him and in the work He has done!
 - You cannot possibly have been redeemed by His work if you do not delight in it...
 - so it is only natural that all who have been so wonderfully turned around by Christ will bless Christ!

2. But you will also bless those who come in Christ's name...

- You will support ministers who faithfully preach God's word and missionaries who carry it to the ends of the earth...
 - You will say, how blessed are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace...
 - You will delight in the publication of God's word.
 - You will see that it is the word of Christ that goes forth and you will encourage others to receive it.
 - You won't be content to praise God only in private, but you will be zealous for the public worship of God—

- where Christ has appointed that His work be proclaimed and that His people be assembled to give praise and thanks to His name.

D. The last response to God's turn around is given in verse 27—

- It can be summarised as a response of concern that the praise that has begun to sound forth from you and the rest of the church will continue to sound forth...
1. You first acknowledge that it is God who has given you understanding to praise—
 - The verse could be translated,
 - “Mighty is the LORD, He has given us light.”
 - This is an acknowledgement that the only reason we can see the significance and the wonderfulness of the turn around that Jesus has accomplished for us is because God has enlightened us—
 - He has given us light or we would still be in the darkness...
 - Many are!
 - This work of Christ has been done, they have heard about it, and it means nothing to them!
 - They are blind—they cannot see why a turn around was needed...
 - Things don't seem so bad to them...
 - That is why there are so many churches today that present Jesus not as the one who completely turns things around and who brings us from Hell to Heaven...
 - but that God offers to us an example, a little comfort, a little help to reach our full potential—a little therapy and some encouragement...
 - They are completely blind when it comes to seeing that we were dead and condemned and unable to even contribute to our salvation...
 - That we must trust in Jesus alone for our salvation.
 - Brothers and sisters,
 - If you have been enabled to see the glory of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ,
 - then you know that it is only because God opened your eyes.
 - As Paul says in 2 Cor 4:6:
 - For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

TRANS> And so you respond to God in Ps 118:27 by first declaring that He is the reason you see the glory of His salvation...

2. But the verse goes on to say:

- “Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar...”
- a. What does that have to do with God opening our eyes?
 - The idea is that in the OT,
 - the people vowed to offer sacrifices to God when they came to give thanks to Him for answering their prayers...
 - you remember Jacob’s vow at Bethel...
 - The concern here seems to be that they might forget to keep their vow...
 - That they might not make it all the way to altar with their sacrifices.
 - The language in the original is more literally translated,
 - “Bind the sacrifice with cords **as far as** the altar”
 - in other words, “Until it gets all the way to the altar.”
 - This is a better translation because it was never the practice to bind a sacrifice to the actual horns of the altar...
 - After the sacrifice had been slaughtered, some of the blood was smeared on the horns of the altar...
 - When this was done, it meant that the sacrifice had been brought all the way—
 - It had not gotten away before it was slaughtered...
 - or, to state the concern more directly...
 - the worshipper had not failed to fulfill his vow—he had not neglected to bring his sacrifice.
 - b. Now that is the concern you see!
 - That the LORD has done such a marvellous thing—
 - He has turned everything around for you through Jesus Christ...
 - and He has graciously enabled you to see the wonder of what He had done—He has enlightened you to see how great it is!
 - But what a terrible thing it would be for you to forget to give thanks...

- For you to fail to return to Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving that you have promised...
- For the things of the world to crowd in on you,
 - For you to be drawn away by temptation or discouraged from coming by the pressures that are upon you...
 - For you to lose sight of the wonder of what Christ has done so that you never make it to God's altar with your sacrifice of thanksgiving!
- The prayer is: "Lord bind the sacrifice until I offer it."
- "Do not let the light that is in me now leave me until I have given you the proper offering of thanksgiving."
- "You have given me understanding, do not take it away."

TRANS> And so brothers and sisters,

- When you sing Psalm 118-C,
 - You join your voice to Jesus to sing of the marvellous turn around that God has accomplished for the whole church through Him...
 - And then you respond to this great work with resolutions to praise God forever, and with prayers and supplications that you will follow through with those resolutions that you have made.

Psalm 118 then concludes even as it began—with a call from Jesus to us and from us to one another that says:

- "O give thanks to the LORD for He is good! For His mercy endures forever."
- This is a call, I remind you to confess, the word thanks is Yadaw which means to confess what is true about something—
 - In this case, it is to confess what is true about the LORD....
 - And so we confess that He is good—pure good, only good, good in himself...
 - And we confess that His mercy—His Hesed—His faithful covenant love—endures forever.
 - Amen—let it be so!