

The Quotations Bible Study: Series I: The Person of Jesus

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Week 6. Procession: Jesus the King

Prayer: Father, we praise you, the Rock of our salvation. Grant us grace to understand your Word concerning your Son, in Jesus' Name, amen.

Violence, intrigue, plots, narrow escapes—

Love, death, hate, heroism—

Utter defeat, reversal of fortune, victory against the odds—

—sounds like a novel, a best-seller right off the pulp fiction rack. Actually, it is all in Psalm 118, which is the first focus of our attention in this study. Whoever penned the 118th Psalm knew who his enemies were. He also knew how fortunes could be reversed when the LORD entered the picture. So, he waited, to the point of death. The Psalmist waited as long as the LORD waited. And in the end, the victory was secured.

Psalm 118 presents a powerful image of spiritual warfare. Out of that tapestry come two New Testament quotations of enormous significance—one uttered by the crowd on Palm Sunday and the other cited by Jesus in His debates in the Temple.

Let us begin by taking a look at Psalm 118.

I. "... in the name of the LORD"

Focus passages:

The stone the builders rejected

has become the capstone;—Psalm 118:22

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you.—Psalm 118:26

Background: Psalm 118

The exact author of Psalm 118 is unknown. Historically, it is known that Psalm 118 was used in Passover celebrations and in the Feast of Tabernacles, possibly as early as Jesus' time. It may also have had Messianic implications for 1st-century Jews. It is part of a series of psalms (Ps. 113-118) that constitute a collection called the Egyptian *Hallel*, "Egyptian" relating to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and *hallel* meaning praise. These few facts give us some clue as to the meaning of the psalm.

But we do not have to get far into the psalm before we *know* what it means:

"In my anguish I cried to the LORD ..." (Ps. 118:5)

"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." (Ps. 118:8,9)

"They swarmed around me like bees..." (Ps. 118:12)

"I was pushed back and about to fall..." (Ps. 118:13)

"The LORD has chastened me severely..." (Ps. 118:18)

"O LORD, save us..." (Ps. 118:25)

We know who is speaking. This is us—all of us. The images of spiritual warfare here are more vivid than any historical details could provide. It is the war in which we are engaged.

The Psalmist is first a cheerleader, then the leading actor in the drama, then an apologist, then a supplicant. He is a sufferer, first at the hands of his enemies, then at the hands of the LORD. His victory is assured, but he prays to be saved. Finally, he is a prophet. At the end, the Psalmist returns to his first passion, leading the praises of the LORD, with that amazing justification, "for he is good; his love endures forever."

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The last clause occurs dozens of times in the Bible, mostly in the Psalms (Ps. 106; 107; 136), but also elsewhere (1 Chr. 16:34,41; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Jer. 33:11). The *idea* of God's everlasting mercy and grace is even more widespread. It could be thought of as one of the major themes of the entire Bible. The operative word "love" (NIV) has been interpreted several ways: AV *mercy*, ASV and NASB *lovingkindness*, ESV *steadfast love*, NLT *faithful love*. But the meaning is plain. It is talking about that attribute of God that we need to rely on. And it never changes, which is what we need from it most of all.

We are not going to study the entire Psalm 118 in depth, but let us answer a few questions about it.

Q1: The Psalmist urged which three classes of people to affirm that the LORD's love endures forever? (Ps. 118:2-4)

Q2: The Psalmist was in trouble. What steps did he take, and what was the result? (Ps. 118:5)

Q3: The Psalmist affirmed the LORD to be on his side. Then he asked rhetorically, what can man do unto me. Whom does that sound like? (Rom. 8:31)

Q4: What is better, trusting in man or in the LORD? (Ps. 118:8)

Q5: Does it sound as though the Psalmist has had some bad experiences in politics? (Ps. 118:9)

Q6: The Psalmist's enemies had him surrounded, and they were numerous, intrusive, and fierce. What spiritual enemies do we have that are like that? (Ps. 118:12)

Q7: Who will provide the victory? (Ps. 118:14-17)

Q8: Whose hand did the Psalmist see behind his difficulties? (Ps. 118:18)

The Psalmist continued with florid affirmations of the LORD's righteous plan and His answer to the Psalmist's prayer. (Ps. 118:20,21)

Then, the Psalmist made an interesting assertion: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone." (Ps. 118:22) This marks the reversal of fortune. That which was discarded has become the most important component. Moreover, (Ps. 118:23) this was the result of God's sovereign will. The LORD was in fact responsible for all that brought about the day of deliverance. (Ps. 118:24)

Finally, having described how the LORD is going to win the day, the Psalmist directed himself to the LORD, beseeching Him for success (prosperity). (Ps. 118:25) Then the Psalmist revealed the great secret: the salvation is coming in a Person, (Ps. 118:26) one who receives the blessings of God and of His church.

II. "Blessed is he who comes..."

Focus passages: Matt. 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; 19:38; John 12:13 (see below)

Background: Matt. 21:1-11; 23; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 13:34-35; 19:29-40; John 12:12-15

The application of Ps. 118:26 to Jesus occurs in all four Gospels. The passage is actually quoted six times. Four times the verse was uttered by the crowd that greeted Jesus upon His entry into Jerusalem. Their greeting was for a king.

[**Enrichment:** C. H. Toy writes that the quotations all follow the Septuagint, which is hardly different from the Hebrew, only substituting "the Lord" for YHWH in the Hebrew. He also points out that the exclamation "Hosanna", which does not appear in the Old Testament, is an emphatic form of the Hebrew word for "save," a word that appears in Psalm 118:25.]

[**Enrichment:** There is some inconsistency in how the translators render "Blessed" in Matt. 21:9. AV and ASV, "Blessed is ...", Darby and Toy, "Blessed be ...", NLT, "Blessings on ...", Young, ASV, RSV, NIV, NASB, NET, and ESV, "Blessed is ..." In Greek, the word is a perfect passive participle, which leaves numerous translation options open. The same difficulty applies to the other passages.]

All the accounts of Jesus' triumphal entry mention that He was riding on a donkey (AV, *ass*). The Evangelists all presume that we readers understand what that meant. That might have been true up until a couple of centuries ago. But, as one who has seldom ridden a horse and never used one to travel, and who is inexperienced with the pomp, privilege, and ceremony of royalty, the significance of this has always gone completely over my head, and perhaps yours, too.

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Riding on a donkey is prophesied by Zech. 9:9, but a donkey is not the ride of a king. That would be a horse, a battle horse at that, one that would demonstrate the power and authority of the conquering king. A donkey was humble transportation, unfit for battle, the sort of transport used by an ordinary person on a simple, peaceful journey. This sends quite a different message, demonstrating the willingness of Jesus to become the sacrifice.

Let us look briefly at the passages:

A. Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphal entry

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,
“Hosanna to the Son of David!”
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Hosanna in the highest!”—Matt. 21:9

In his “coverage” of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Matthew provided another Scripture citation (Zech. 9:9) in support of Jesus' rightful kingship, in the incident of the donkey.

Q9: Jesus gave specific instructions to the disciples about the donkey and colt. Why? (Matt. 21:1-5)

Q10: How many people showed up for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? (Matt. 14:21; 15:38; 21:8,9)

Q11: Why did some lay their cloaks on the road? (2 Kings 9:13)

Q12: Who does the crowd say Jesus is? (Matt. 21:9)

Q13: Why did people in the city ask who Jesus is? (Matt. 21:10,11)

Q14: So, who were those in the crowd? (Matt. 21:10,11)

Matthew did not bother to point out that the declaration, “Blessed is he...”, comes from the Scriptures. Evidently, everyone knew what it meant, which seems likely in view of the liturgical use of Psalm 118.

B. Jesus' lament over Jerusalem

For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’—Matt. 23:39

During the days following Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He taught in the Temple. At the end of this time, He lamented on the state of Jerusalem and its treatment of messengers from God, predicting woe to the scribes and Pharisees. Let us look at a couple of these statements.

Q15: Jesus said, rather than be called Rabbi, father, or master, it is better to be known as a servant. What kind of servant did He mean? (Matt. 23:8-12; Isa. 53)

Q16: Jesus accused the Pharisees of greed, self-indulgence, and inward death. This is strong language. Verse 33 sounds like John the Baptist. (Matt. 3:7) What was Jesus' intent? (Matt. 23:25,27,33)

Q17: What was Jerusalem's main problem? (Matt. 23:37)

Q18: What did Jesus mean by, “...your house is left to you desolate”? (Matt. 23:38)

Q19: The statement, “...you will not see me again until...”, sounds like a prediction. What is going to happen? (Matt. 23:39)

What follows is the Olivet discourse, as Jesus' teaching turned more towards the future. We can conclude confidently that, since Jesus will return and since He will enter Jerusalem as eternal King, the people of Jerusalem will hail Him again as King with the words of Psalm 118.

C. Mark's account of Jesus' triumphal entry

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,
“Hosanna!”
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”—Mark 11:9

Mark's coverage of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, follows the same form as Matthew's, with these differences: (1) Jesus specified that the colt was one on whom no one had ever sat, (2) Mark omitted the reference to Zech. 9:9, and (3) Mark included the experience of those who went to find the donkey. Was Peter, Mark's mentor, one of the disciples who was sent on that errand? Perhaps so.

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Q20: Why did Jesus give specific instructions to the disciples about the donkey and colt? (Mark. 11:1-3)
Why was the colt to be one that no one had ever ridden? (1 Sam. 6:7) (Hint: unused animals were considered more suitable for sacred purposes.)

Q21: Why did those who stood nearby the colt not object when the disciples came and took it? (Mark 11:4-6)

Q22: Who does the crowd say Jesus is? (Mark 11:9,10)

Jesus did not spend the night in Jerusalem, but returned to Bethany, perhaps two or three miles away, where He had friends.

D. Jesus' defiant warning

“Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”—Luke 13:35

Luke 13 begins Jesus' teaching about God's providence and sovereignty. This was an, at best, uncomfortable message for His audience. Then Jesus talked about how shockingly few would be saved. Later on in the day, the Pharisees came to warn Jesus to leave, for Herod was hunting Him.

Q23: Jesus flung His defiance of Herod back in their faces. What did Jesus think about Herod? (Hint: “fox” did not have the connotation “sly” as it does in our language; rather, its implication was insignificance or weakness.) (Luke 13:32,33)

Q24: What did Jesus mean by mentioning the “third day”? (Luke 13:32)

The passage that follows in Luke 13:34,35 gives virtually the same form of words as Matt. 23:37-39. In Matthew, these words were recorded as uttered after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Here they are recorded as having been uttered well before, on the way to Jerusalem, in fact.

Some have seen an anachronism here, and they suppose that one or the other of the Evangelists got the sequence of events wrong. Particularly in view of the use such critics make of this, I think that a very reasonable alternative is possible. There is no reason to suppose that Jesus, who had this subject very much on His mind, could not have said this twice or more, once as in this passage from Luke about His first triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and again in Matthew about His final triumphal entry in the last days to come. The warning and judgment on Jerusalem were the same in either case, and it is a powerful irony that Jesus' rejection as rightful King means He will return to Jerusalem as conquering King.

E. Luke's account of Jesus' triumphal entry

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”—Luke 19:38

Luke's account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem follows Mark's very closely, including the disciples' encounter with the owner, as he is identified in Luke, of the colt. But note that Luke left no doubt as to who was coming. It was the king.

Q25: Luke recorded the reason why people began to rejoice and praise God. What was it? (Luke 19:37)

Q26: In contrast to Matthew and Mark, Luke describes the crowd as including the word “king” in their paraphrase of Psalm 118:26. Is this significant? (Luke 19:38)

Q27: When some of the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke His disciples, what was their reason? (Luke 19:39)

Q28: What was Jesus saying in His response? (Hab. 2:11; Luke 19:40)

F. John's account of Jesus' triumphal entry

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the King of Israel!”—John 12:13

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The account of John on the triumphal entry into Jerusalem is brief in comparison to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but includes some of the same details. John also added another line, stating, in effect, that the one who comes in the name of the Lord is the rightful King of Israel.

Q29: How many people were there? (John 12:12)

Q30: What were the people doing there in Jerusalem? (John 12:12)

Q31: What was their expectation? (John 12:13)

Q32: With deliberate symbolism, Jesus obtained a donkey and entered Jerusalem riding on it, fulfilling prophecy, as John points out. What was required before the disciples understood the meaning of this? (John 12:14-16)

John included the quotation from Zech. 9:9 to complete his account of that event.

III. “The stone the builders rejected ...”

Focus passage: Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10,11; Luke 20:17 (see below)

Background: Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12; Luke 20

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is followed by an account of His throwing out the moneychangers and merchants from the Temple. Then He began to teach and debate in the Temple. It was during this couple of days that the other usage of Psalm 118 arose.

The simile of the cornerstone came at the conclusion of the parable of the vineyard. In short, the absentee owner of a vineyard demanded payment from the tenants he had hired to run it. They refused, beating some messengers and killing others. Then the owner sent his son, thinking that at least they will respect him. But they see this as the opportunity to take over ownership of the vineyard, and so they kill him. Jesus concluded the parable by asking what the owner will do. The answer to His question was given, that the owner will return and destroy them, and give the job to others who will operate it properly.

We will not take the time to analyze this parable in detail, in its variants among the Gospels. But it is a blunt picture of the history of Israel and of what was going to happen. And the Pharisees knew it. (Matt. 21:45) In not heeding the warning, they hastened to bring it about.

[**Enrichment:** One note about the quotation: the Aramaic for son (*ben*) and stone (*eben*) form a play on words not visible in the Greek. Jesus may have been associating the parable in which the son is rejected and the quotation in which the rejected stone becomes the cornerstone because the play on words strengthens the identification of one with the other, and both with Himself.]

A. Matthew’s account of the stone the builders rejected

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’”—Matt. 21:42

Jesus concluded the parable of the vineyard by quoting Psalm 118:22, a passage that all His listeners were intimately familiar with.

Q33: How does the passage about the stone the builders rejected summarize the parable of the vineyard? (Matt. 21:33-42)

Q34: Who was the cornerstone? Who were the builders? (Matt. 21:42)

Q35: What will happen to those who possess the Kingdom of God as Jesus speaks? Who are the people to whom it will be given? (Matt. 21:43)

Q36: Who are the two classes of people, those who fall on the stone and those who are crushed by it? (Matt. 21:44)

Q37: What particular belief of the people caused the chief priests and Pharisees to fear the consequences of taking Jesus into custody? (Matt. 21:46)

So, the authorities had to let Jesus go, for the moment. But they knew whom Jesus was speaking against. The direct application in Matt. 21:43 is only found in Matthew.

B. Mark’s account of the stone the builders rejected

“Haven’t you read this scripture: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’”—Mark 12:10-11

In Mark’s account of the parable of the vineyard, Jesus answered, or repeated the answer to, His own question, namely, the lord of the vineyard will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others to manage.

Q38: What source did Jesus cite? (Mark 12:10)

Q39: In this reversal of fortune, who has done it? Is it amazing? (Mark 12:11)

Q40: “They” were evidently the Pharisees and the Temple rulers. How did they perceive the parable? (Mark 12:12)

Q41: Why did they not simply seize Jesus immediately? (Mark 12:12)

The Pharisees received the message clearly, (Mark 12:12) and they set out to destroy Jesus, but were hindered by fear of the people.

C. Luke’s account of the stone the builders rejected

Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone?’”—Luke 20:17

In Luke’s account of the parable of the vineyard, Jesus answers His own question. Luke quoted only the first half of Psalm 118:22.

Q42: After Jesus affirmed the conclusion of the parable, what response of the people did Luke record? (Luke 20:16)

Q43: Did they understand the parable? (Luke 20:16)

Q44: The people’s expression, “May this never be!” (“God forbid”, AV), shows that they didn’t believe Jesus. How did He convince them? (Luke 20:17)

Q45: Did what Jesus implicitly predicted happen? (Luke 20:18)

Jesus’ parable hit the mark (Luke 20:19), but the chief priests and scribes would not heed the warning. What a difference belief makes!

IV. Conclusion

The position of the two excerpts from Ps. 118 in the Gospel accounts places this psalm near the very center of Jesus’ mission. Psalm 118:26, used as a greeting for the entering King, is a clear affirmation of both Jesus’ and the Psalmist’s prophetic offices. Just as being called “the Son of God” must be blasphemous unless it is true, so being greeted as the coming King, in public, as David’s heir, is also blasphemous—*unless it is true*.

Jesus left no doubt that, while the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a product of His followers’ untested enthusiasm, He sanctioned it. By specifying the exact conditions for obtaining His transport, He illustrated that He wanted it done exactly so, because there was a message to be sent. A few verses later, following the parable of the vineyard in the synoptic Gospels, we read that the message was received.

So, what was the message? It seems to have several components:

1. The coming King rightly claimed His place;
2. He came in peace;
3. The King’s right was foretold in powerful detail;
4. The rulers of Israel rejected the rightful King, foregoing Israel’s last opportunity to set things right;
5. Therefore, judgment will come;
6. Finally, the Lord will intervene, and the rejected son will ascend the throne of Israel.

For a simple psalm, a procession, and a straightforward parable, these passages have turned out to be an enormously significant and amazingly complete statement about Jesus, Israel, and God’s sovereignty.

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The strength of the parable lies in the parallel between the son who is killed and God's own Son, who was killed. Jesus is the Son whose rejection and subsequent murder is "the last straw." The main point to the parable is that the owner is going to return in vengeance and righteous judgment to destroy and *replace* the tenants. Here is the message of the parable, and those who heard it, knew it. They recognized themselves in the parable and knew that was exactly what Jesus intended.

Jesus was not the only prophet to threaten judgment for Israel, but He was the last. When Israel rejected Him, God fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 118, making Jesus the foundation of a new order, breaking and crushing whoever would object.

So, who are the new tenants and what is the new building? For our answer, we turn to the first epistle of Peter, where he wrote, (quoting Ps. 118:22, as you will see)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone, "

and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:4-10)

Can we pray this **prayer** together?

Father, we receive the blessing of knowledge of the Kingdom. Increase our belief and make us more fit to serve in the new order that your Son is building. Grant us servant hearts, in Jesus' Name, amen.