

Exposition on Psalm 118

by St. Augustine

The sermon is an exposition on Psalm 118, highlighting the Church's praise and thanksgiving to God for its salvation and deliverance.

Scripture: Psalm 117:1, Psalm 118:4, Psalm 118:6, Psalm 118:8, Psalm 118:12, Psalm 118:16, Psalm 118:22, Psalm 118:27, Mark 10:17

Topics: "Praise And Worship", "Gods Mercy"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the importance of praising the Lord and confessing His goodness, emphasizing that God's mercy endures forever. He encourages all, from Israel to those who fear the Lord, to acknowledge God's enduring mercy and to trust in His help against all enemies, whether human or spiritual. St. Augustine reflects on the sufferings and victories of the Church, pointing to Christ as the cornerstone and salvation. He concludes by highlighting the everlasting joy and praise found in God's grace and mercy.

Transcript

1. ...We are taught in this Psalm, when we chaunt Allelujah, which means, Praise the Lord, that we should, when we hear the words, Confess unto the Lord Psalm 117:1, praise the Lord. The praise of God could not be expressed in fewer words than these, For He is good. I see not what can be more solemn than this brevity, since goodness is so peculiarly the quality of God, that the Son of God Himself when addressed by some one as Good Master, by one, namely, who beholding His flesh, and comprehending not the fullness of His divine nature, considered Him as man only, replied, Why do you call Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. Mark 10:17-18 And what is this but to say, If you wish to call Me good, recognise Me as God? But since it is addressed, in revelation of things to come, to a people freed from all toil and wandering in pilgrimage, and from all admixture with the wicked, which freedom was given it through the grace of God, who not only does not evil for evil, but even returns good for evil; it is most appropriately added, Because His mercy endures for ever.

2. Let Israel now confess that He is good, and that His mercy endures for ever Psalm 117:2. Let the house of Aaron now confess that His mercy endures for ever Psalm 117:3. Yea, let all now that fear the Lord confess that His mercy endures for ever Psalm 117:4. You remember, I suppose, most beloved, what is the house of Israel, what is the house of Aaron, and that both are those that fear the Lord. For they are the little and the great, who have already in another Psalm been happily introduced into your hearts: in the

number of whom all of us should rejoice that we are joined together, in His grace who is good, and whose mercy endures for ever; since they were listened to who said, May the Lord increase you more and more, you and your children; that the host of the Gentiles might be added to the Israelites who believed in Christ, of the number of whom are the Apostles our fathers, for the exaltation of the perfect and the obedience of the little children; that all of us when made one in Christ, made one flock under one Shepherd, and the body of that Head, like one man, may say, I called upon the Lord in trouble, and the Lord heard me at large Psalm 117:5. The narrow straits of our tribulation are limited: but the large way whereby we pass along has no end. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Romans 8:33

3. The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man does unto me Psalm 117:6. But are men, then, the only enemies that the Church has? What is a man devoted to flesh and blood, save flesh and blood? But the Apostle says, We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against,...he says, spiritual wickedness in high places; Ephesians 6:12 that is, the devil and his angels; that devil whom elsewhere he calls the prince of the power of the air. Ephesians 2:2 Hear therefore what follows: The Lord is my helper: therefore shall I despise mine enemies Psalm 117:7. From what class soever my enemies may arise, whether from the number of evil men, or from the number of evil angels; in the Lord's help, unto whom we chant the confession of praise, unto whom we sing Allelujah, they shall be despised.

4. But, when my enemies have been brought to contempt, let not my friend present himself unto me as a good man, so as to bid me repose my hope in himself: for It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man Psalm 117:8. Nor let any one, who may in a certain sense be styled a good angel, be regarded by myself as one in whom I ought to put my trust: for no one is good, save God alone; Mark 10:18 and when a man or an angel appear to aid us, when they do this of sincere affection, He does it through them, who made them good after their measure. It is therefore better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in princes Psalm 117:9. For angels also are called princes, even as we read in Daniel, Michael, your prince. Daniel 12:1

5. All nations compassed me round about, but in the Name of the Lord have I taken vengeance on them Psalm 117:10. They kept me in on every side, they kept me in, I say, on every side; but in the Name of the Lord have I taken vengeance on them Psalm 117:11. He signifies the toils and the victory of the Church; but, as if the question were asked how she could have overcome so great evils, he looks back to the example, and declares what she had first suffered in her Head, by adding what follows, They kept me in on every side: and the words, All nations, are with reason not repeated here, because this was the act of the Jews alone. There that very religious nation (which is the body of Christ, and in behalf of which was done all that was done in mortal form with immortal power, by that inward divinity, through the outward flesh), suffered from persecutors, of whose race that flesh was assumed and hung upon the cross.

6. They came about me as bees do a hive, and burned up even as the fire among the thorns: and in the Name of the Lord have I taken vengeance on them Psalm 117:12. Here then the order of the words corresponds with the order of events. For we rightly understand that our Lord Himself, the Head of the Church, was surrounded by persecutors, even as bees surround a hive. For the Holy Spirit is speaking with mystic subtlety of what was done by those who knew not what they did. For bees make honey in the hives: while our Lord's persecutors, unconscious as they were, rendered Him sweeter unto us even by His very Passion; so that we may taste and see how sweet is the Lord, Who died for our sins, and arose for our justification. Romans 4:25 But what follows, and burned up even as the fire among the thorns, is better understood of His Body, that is, of a people spread abroad, whom all nations compassed about, since it was gathered together from all nations. They consumed this sinful flesh, and the grievous piercings of this

mortal life, in the flame of persecution. Taken vengeance on them: either because they themselves, that wickedness, which in them persecuted the righteous, having been extinguished, were joined with the people of Christ; or because the rest of them, who have at this time scorned the mercy of Him who calls them, will at the end feel the truth of Him who judges them.

7. I have been driven on like a heap of sand, so that I was falling, but the Lord upheld me Psalm 117:13. For though there were a great multitude of believers, that might be compared to the countless sand, and brought into one communion as into one heap; yet what is man, save Thou be mindful of Him? He said not, the multitude of the Gentiles could not surpass the abundance of my host, but, the Lord, he says, has upheld me. The persecution of the Gentiles succeeded not in pushing forward, to its overthrow, the host of the faithful dwelling together in the unity of the faith.

8. The Lord is my strength and my praise, and has become my salvation Psalm 117:14. Who then fall, when they are pushed, save they who choose to be their own strength and their own praise? For no man falls in the contest, except he whose strength and praise fails. He therefore whose strength and praise is the Lord, falls no more than the Lord falls. And for this reason He has become their salvation; not that He has become anything which He was not before, but because they, when they believed on Him, became what they were not before, and then He began to be salvation unto them when turned towards Him, which He was not to them when turned away from Himself.

9. The voice of joy and health is in the dwellings of the righteous Psalm 117:15; where they who raged against their bodies thought there was the voice of sorrow and destruction. For they did not know the inward joy of the saints in their future hope. Whence the Apostle also says, As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; 2 Corinthians 6:10 and again, And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also. Romans 5:3

10. The right hand of the Lord has brought mighty things to pass Psalm 117:16. What mighty things? Says he. The right hand of the Lord, he says, has exalted me. It is a mighty thing to exalt the humble, to deify the mortal, to bring perfection out of infirmity, glory from subjection, victory from suffering, to give help, to raise from trouble; that the true salvation of God might be laid open to the afflicted, and the salvation of men might remain of no avail to the persecutors. These are great things: but what are you surprised at? Hear what he repeats: The right hand of the Lord has brought mighty things to pass.

11. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord Psalm 117:17. But they, while they were dealing havoc and death on every side, thought that the Church of Christ was dying. Behold, he now declares the works of the Lord. Everywhere Christ is the glory of the blessed Martyrs. By being beaten He conquered those who struck Him; by being patient of torments, the tormentors; by loving, those who raged against Him.

12. Nevertheless, let him point out to us, why the body of Christ, the holy Church, the people of adoption, suffered such indignities. The Lord, he says, hast chastened and corrected me, but He has not given me over unto death Psalm 117:18. Let not then the boastful wicked imagine that anything has been permitted to their power: they would not have that power, were it not given them from above. Oft does the father of a family command his sons to be corrected by the most worthless slaves; though he designs the heritage for the former, fetters for the latter. What is that heritage? Is it of gold, or silver, or jewels, or farms, or pleasant estates? Consider how we enter into it: and learn what it is.

13. Open me, he says, the gates of righteousness Psalm 117:19. Behold, we have heard of the gates. What is within? That I may, he says, go into them, and give thanks unto the Lord. This is the confession of

praise full of wonder, even unto the house of God, in the voice of joy and confession of praise, among such as keep holiday: this is the everlasting bliss of the righteous, whereby they are blessed who dwell in the Lord's house, praising Him for evermore.

14. But consider how the gates of righteousness are entered into. These are the gates of the Lord he says, the righteous shall enter into them Psalm 117:20. At least let no wicked man enter there, that Jerusalem which receives not one uncircumcised, where it is said, Without are dogs. Revelation 22:15 Be it enough, that in my long pilgrimage I have had my habitation among the tents of Kedar: I endured even unto the end the intercourse of the wicked, but these are the gates of the Lord: the righteous shall enter into them.

15. I will confess unto You, O Lord, for You have heard me, and have become my salvation Psalm 117:21. How often is that confession proved to be one of praise, that does not point out wounds to the physician, but gives thanks for the health it has received. But the Physician Himself is the Salvation.

16. But who is this whom we speak of? The Stone which the builders rejected Psalm 117:22; for It has become the head Stone of the corner to make in Himself of two one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body; Ephesians 2:15-16 circumcision, to wit, and uncircumcision.

17. By the Lord was it made unto it Psalm 117:23: that is, it is made into the head stone of the corner by the Lord. For although He would not have become this, had He not suffered: yet He became not this through those from whom He suffered. For they who were building, refused Him: but in the edifice which the Lord was secretly raising, that was made the head stone of the corner which they rejected. And it is marvellous in our eyes: in the eyes of the inner man, in the eyes of those that believe, those that hope, those that love; not in the carnal eyes of those who, through scorning Him as if He were a man, rejected Him.

18. This is the day which the Lord has made Psalm 117:24. This man remembers that he had said in former Psalms, Since He has inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live; making mention of his old days; whence he now says, This is the day which the Lord has made; that is, wherein He has given me Salvation. This is the day whereof He said, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of Salvation have I helped you; Isaiah 49:8 that is, a day wherein He, the Mediator, has become the head Stone of the corner. Let us rejoice, therefore, and be glad in Him.

19. Save me now, O Lord: prosper Thou well my way, O Lord Psalm 117:25. Because it is the day of Salvation, save me: because we, returning from a long pilgrimage, are separated from those who hated peace, with whom we were peaceful, and who, when we spoke to them, made war upon us without a cause; prosper well our way as we return, since You have become our Way.

20. Blessed be He that comes in the Name of the Lord Psalm 117:26. Cursed, therefore, is he that comes in his own name; as He says in the Gospel: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. John 5:43 We have blessed you out of the house of God. I believe that these are the words of the great to the little, of those great ones, to wit, who in spirit commune with God the Word, who is with God, as they may in this life; and yet temper their discourse for the sake of the little ones, so that they may sincerely say what the Apostle says: For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constrains us. 2 Corinthians 5:13-14 They bless the little children from the inner house of the Lord, where that praise fails not age after age: consider therefore what they

proclaim from thence.

21. God is the Lord, who has showed us light Psalm 117:27. That Lord, who came in the Lord's Name, whom the builders refused, and who became the head Stone of the corner, Matthew 21:9, 42 that Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, 1 Timothy 2:5 is God, He is equal with the Father, He has showed us light, that we might understand what we believed, and declare it to you who understand it not as yet, but already believe it. But that you also may understand, Declare a holy day in full assemblies, even unto the horns of the altar; that is, even unto the inner house of God, from which we have blessed you, where are the high places of the altar. Declare a holy day, not in a slothful manner, but in full assemblies Psalm 117:28. For this is the voice of joyfulness among those that keep holy day, who walk in the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even unto the house of God. For if there be there the spiritual sacrifice, the everlasting sacrifice of praise, both the Priest is everlasting, and the peaceful mind of the righteous an everlasting altar....

22. And what shall we sing there, save His praises? What else shall we say there, save, You are my God, and I will confess unto You; You are my God, and I will praise You. I will confess unto You, for You have heard me, and art become my Salvation. We will not say these things in loud words; but the love that abides in Him of itself cries out in these words, and these words are love itself. Thus as he began with praise, so he ends: Confess unto the Lord, for He is gracious, and His mercy endures for ever Psalm 117:29. With this the Psalm commences, with this it ends; since, as from the commencement which we have left behind, so in the end, whither we are returning, there is not anything that can more profitably please us, than the praise of God, and Allelujah evermore.

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