**“Rejoice”**

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**Psalm 118:1-6, 22-24**

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8. 19-28

 Advent 3

Psalm 118:1-6, concluding with verses 22-24: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, ‘His steadfast love endures forever.’ Let the house of Aaron say, ‘His steadfast love endures forever.’ Let those who fear the Lord say, ‘His steadfast love endures forever.’ Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let **us** rejoice and be glad in it.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

God’s “Steadfast Love” spoken so much of in this Psalm **is** the “**Stone rejected by men**” **(killed / crucified)**. It’s Jesus, Bethlehem’s baby (by the incarnation of God into man so as to be able to die as the Father’s personally-provided sacrifice for sin … His own Son) … and **that’s** **“marvelous in the eyes” of the faithful … joy follows**. And the “**day** that the Lord has made” is only secondarily any **individual “day” that follows because of that Gospel**. What it is first is a day that’s not just **a day at all**, but the eternal day of God’s new covenant in His Son’s blood, Him **laying the Cornerstone of Salvation on Christmas**. See, it’s from **there** that the on the cross with defeated death’s curse, and, through the Easter resurrection, promises our own. And **THAT** makes **the day** / **any** day **(because of it) joyful**. So “what can man (or this world) do to me” since that’s happened **for me?** **With the Lord “setting me free out of my distress” by the Gospel of** **“His Steadfast Love enduring forever”** **…** **NOTHING MUCH at all!**

Text

Psalm 118 is the last (and climax) of what’s called the “**Hallel**” of the psalter (Psalms 113-118), all about praise (or “Hallel” which is Hebrew for “Praise” with “Hallelujah” as “Praise to Yahweh / God”). And Martin Luther called 118 “**his own beloved psalm**”. He said that, but doesn’t mind sharing it, though (“his own beloved Psalm”).

“I will not **be jealous** but will **gladly share what I mine**. Would to God **all the world** would claim this psalm for its own as I do!” …

… because he warns that, “sad to say, there are **few**, even among those who should do better, who honestly say even once in their lifetime to Scripture or to one of the psalms: ‘You are **my** **beloved book**; you must be **my very own psalm**.’ The **neglect** of Scripture is one of the greatest evils in the world. Everything else, arts or literature, is pursued and practiced day and night, and there is no end of labor and effort; but **Holy Scripture is neglected as though there were no need of it**. Those who **condescend to read it** want to absorb everything at once. There has never been an art or a book on earth that everyone has **so quickly mastered** (and he’s tongue in cheek on this) as the Holy Scriptures. But its words are not, as some think, **mere literature**; they are **words of life**, intended not for speculation and fantasy but **for life and action**” … and the **text itself would say** “for reminding us what to **rejoice in**”.

And there is much more to Psalm 118 than what I read (29 verses, and I read of it 9). But these (that I’d read) summarize what we **remind-ourselves** **by placing them upon our lips to say them** at the beginning of our services each week: that “this (and every “this” of a day or moment or situation made anew from the Gospel) is the vast and forever-now-existing one the **Lord has made** … and done so **for us to rejoice and be glad in**”.

And “**why**” is reminded is the Gospel itself (the “Steadfast Love of God”). Promised for 4,000 years, **came**, remembered (incarnate) in Christmas. Advent (every once of Advent anticipation and wanting) gives way to the “**One coming as waited for**” … and every promise God makes gains credibility through, ultimately, the **promise kept lying in Bethlehem’s manger**.

The gift **demanding of us** is: “let **us** rejoice and **be glad in it always”!** Today’s Epistle adds the “**always**” part of the demand: “**rejoice always**”. And the Gospel (God’s “Steadfast Love in Christ”) gets **neglected** too often (if ever), rejected in ones who **reject the need for such a valuable sacrifice to have been made for them**, and “Hallel” praise and rejoicing **does not proceed from that, people not willing to become “glad in it” (or receive benefits that they don’t think they much need)**.

And, maybe, **we’re** not “glad” **always**. Maybe we, too, “rejoice” only periodically, too overwhelmed by the events of our days (**our** New Testament times) and have only let Holy Scripture (that Gospel / Good News) **go so-deep and not too-deep**, not burrow itself into the soul instead of just into our sensibilities, not embed itself but just scratch the surface simply to create only a momentary emotion or tweak a sentiment. Maybe COVID is too devastating, or not devastating enough, for us to allow or want a gladness to cut through what we’d only encourage a momentary distraction to do.

But “rejoice **always**!” is the demand. “Let **us** rejoice and **be glad in what is given us in Good News!**” If **neglect is the case** even **with us** (just **a little**, or maybe **too much if any**) then the “Lord’s way prepared” needs, first, **our preparation** in the awareness of **extreme need that we have** for the **Salvation** that Jesus **came to bring** … **ours** to **receive by gracious mercy upon us who are not worthy of it (but given it anyway)**. If there’s a **hold-up**, then remove that obstacle through repentance. Give to the Lord, first, the fullness of your presumed and arrogant “**self-sufficiency**” (which is also an unbelief that He can cure you of and heal you of and comfort you and promise what you can have to look forward to and cling to and hope for beyond just a wishful thought).

The fact is: “**Joy IS to the World**” since **the Lord has come**. Those in it **know that** **down deep**. It’s gift and joy for a **world** (and everyone in it) … and we receive it first, but then wish everyone would, engraining themselves in it, and that we too would never question or forget it … **(with everyone) enjoy it always** … **(with everyone)** “**rejoice always**” … and **for Good and right (and confident) Gospel reason**.

Application

And we’re only reminded-of that Good and right (confident) Gospel reason with the Words of it … and audibly heard by us. “Faith” (which is that joy lived and acted upon) “comes from **hearing**, and **hearing through the Word of Christ**”. The Epistle writer and psalmist make **practical** the way to “rejoice … and be- (and do-) so **always**”: “Pray **without ceasing**” 1 Thessalonians **says**, “give thanks **in all circumstances**, for **this** is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit” (be where the Spirit is promised to work). “Do not despise prophesies but test everything” (to make sure that it’s indeed the Word and Gospel of God), hold fast what is good, and abstain from every form of evil”. “Let Israel **say** (in other words, **speak out loud / put it upon the lips of us as the Church / Israel**) “’God’s Steadfast Love’” (that’s Christ and His work and Word) “’endures forever’”. “Let the house of Aaron” (the preaching task) **say** (and **always say**) “’God’s Steadfast Love’” (Christ and His work and Word) “’endures forever’”. “Let those who fear the Lord” (all crushed by the demand of the Law for holiness before a righteous God) “**say (out loud)**: ‘God’s Steadfast Love’” (Christ and His work and Word) “’endures forever’”.

I did not tell you Martin Luther’s favorite verse within this “his” Psalm (verse 17 of this “Hallel” of praise and joy, Psalm 118): “I shall not die” it **says**, “but **I shall live**, and **RECOUNT** the deeds of the Lord.” Luther **relied** on this precious verse (and it guided him), beyond the **full** Psalm / beyond **all** the Psalms and all of Scripture which he also **entirely** devoured and rejoiced in, but **this was his results text / confidence through earthly challenges and even death and Words that he’d recount (out loud) to both himself and everyone else he’d meet (of “the deeds of the Lord”)**.

Today’s Epistle leaves us with a **benediction toward this end**, so **hear it’s Words said**: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify **you** completely, and may **your** whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (at His Advent). He who calls you **is faithful**; **He will surely do it**.”

“This **is, indeed**, the **Day** that the Lord has made; let us (together and out loud) “**rejoice and be glad IN IT**”. Put that **whole verse on your lips** (and join me with **it all** from the beginning of that verse): “**THIS IS the day that the Lord has made; LET US rejoice and be glad IN IT!**” … **because of +Jesus**. Amen.