

Psalms 109-119

'The Songs Of Salvation'



9am & 10:30am Gatherings, Holy Trinity City
Term 4, 2013

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November at Trinity City is our vision month. Over four Sundays, we look back on the many blessings God has given us in the year, and look forward as a church to the year ahead. Invariably this involves focusing on specific plans and goals and a large degree of faith in God to take them and use them (and us) for His glory.

But undergirding all our plans is the deep realisation that the LORD has acted to save us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Each year we step out in faith out of a deep sense of thankfulness to Him, and a shared joy that we (as His people) are caught up in a much larger plan of God to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth.

These are also the realisations given expression in Psalms 109-119. The overall theme is salvation, and then our response to it. The Psalms give voice to our need for salvation, to the Lord's solution, and then our collective response to all that God has done for us. It is my prayer that God would help us see afresh - or perhaps for the first time - the sheer delight that it is to be saved by Him as an individual, and also collectively as His people, and to express our gratitude to Him. May God lift your hearts this month.

*Chris Jolliffe
October, 2013*

		Date Preached	
Psalms 109-111	An awesome Saviour	October 27	
Psalm 115	Not to us be the glory	November 3	Vision Sunday
Psalm 119	Longing for his voice	November 10	Leadership Sunday
Psalm 116	How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness towards me?	November 17	Ministry Sunday
Psalm 118	Blessed is he ...	November 24	Thanksgiving Sunday

1

An Awesome Saviour

Psalms 109-111

Taken together, Psalms 109-111 describe a journey of salvation, beginning with a personal cry to God (Psalm 109), through to a statement about Christ (Psalm 110), through to congregational praise (Psalm 111).

Introduction:

What is it that you most value about Jesus as your Saviour? Talk about this.

Pray for God to open your eyes to know him better.

1. Psalm 109: A cry for salvation from sustained, personal, unjust and focused attack.

(a) Read verses 1-5.

- What is David asking for?

- Why?

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(b) Read verses 6-20.

- This is the longest 'curse' in the Psalms. It surprises us that it occurs on David's lips.¹ In it David explains what he has asked the Lord for in verse 1. What is the reason for the curse? (verses 16-19).
- To whom is it directed? (verses 6, 20).² Who ultimately embodies David's accuser? (Acts 1: 20)
- What is the substance of the curse? (verses 7-15)

¹Though we also note that Jesus himself was not averse to cursing his adversaries! ('Woe to you Korazin ...', 'Woe to you Pharisees ...'; Matthew 11: 21, 23: 13-29)

²The movement from plural adversaries in verse 5 to a singular one in verse 6 is best explained by the singular 'him' of verse 6 referring to his main, or chief adversary. David's call for an 'evil man' to oppose his adversary is unpacked by his alternate reference to this person as his adversaries' 'accuser'. This is the Hebrew word from which the name 'Satan' derives. We can't conclude from this that David is calling on the Lord to bring Satan against his adversary, but simply one who can rightly accuse this person before God himself.

(c) Read verses 21-25, and 26-29.

- What does David ask for himself? What is he asking for in verse 27?
- What does David look forward to doing? How is this a fitting response to salvation?
- Reflect: What particular insight does this Psalm give us about salvation?

Psalm 109 saw David asking God to appoint for him someone who could legitimately accuse his enemy before God. Clearly such a person is one of immense status and power. Psalm 110 reveals who that person is.

2. Psalm 110: David's Lord

Read the Psalm. The form of this Psalm is not a prayer, or a song of praise, but a prophetic declaration - an announcement. What is announced finds its origin in 'the LORD' ('The Lord says ...' - verse 1, 'The LORD will extend ...' - verse 2, 'The LORD has sworn ...' - verse 4)

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(a) The King - verses 1-3

- Three persons are mentioned in verse 1. Who is talking to whom about whom?³
- Who is given the position of ultimate authority at the LORD's right hand? When? (Acts 2: 32-36)
- What is evoked by the pictures of the authority given to David's Lord?
- Where, in the Old Testament, and New Testament, is this fulfilled?⁴

(b) The Priest - verse 4

- Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14.18-20 - a unique figure in the Bible, seemingly eternal, and simultaneously Jerusalem's King and Priest. What does it mean to be a 'priest in the order of Melchizedek'?⁵ (Hebrews 7: 23-27, 10: 11-14)

³cf. Mark 12: 35-37. NB Where the NIV has 'LORD' in capitals, it is an attempted translation of the meaning of the personal name of the LORD God himself (lit: 'Yhwh').

⁴cf, for example, Hebrews 11:32-38; Revelation 21: 11

⁵Leaders - familiarise yourselves with Hebrews 5: 5-10, 6: 19 — 7: 28

- Reflect: it is one thing for Jesus to be this priest-king, but it is another for God to be so determined that this be so. Why is God unalterably determined that David's Lord should also be a priest 'in the order of Melchizedek'?

(c) The Warrior - verses 5-7

The coronation of verse 1 is not the final scene, but only a prelude to world conquest. Here, David prophetically addresses God regarding his King, seeing them act as one (verse 5a) in the last and terrible battle to extinguish all evil and judge evildoers.⁶

- What is the final picture we are left with?
- How is this a satisfying answer to David's request in Psalm 109?
- How would you respond to someone who heard that Jesus was their Saviour, but thought they could 'take it or leave it'?

⁶Revelation 19: 11-21

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3. Praise for God's glorious Salvation: Psalm 111

Psalm 111 finishes with a reminder that wisdom consists in fearing the LORD, to whom belongs eternal praise.

Read Psalm 111

- Assuming that there is no contradiction between what's said of God and his works in Psalm 111 and Psalms 109-10, what commentary does Psalm 111 give of God's salvation outlined in Psalm 109-110?

Spend time 'extolling the LORD in the assembly' by talking together about what you most value about Jesus from Psalm 110.

Now take time to tell God in prayer how wonderful his King is.

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Study 2: Not To Us Be The Glory

Psalm 115

On the 23rd of February 1807, in a tribute to a tireless 20 year campaign against slavery by William Wilberforce, the British House of Commons accepted an Abolition bill to ban the transport of Slaves in the British Empire. As tributes were flowing to Wilberforce, and tears were streaming down his face, it was Psalm 115:1 that was the subject of Wilberforce's meditation: 'Not to us O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory'.

Discuss: When, if ever, is it right for Christians to claim glory for themselves?

(If it's never right for this to happen, does this promote thankfulness, or false pride?)

Pray for God to be glorified in our thoughts on this Psalm.

Read Psalm 115

- (a) What deep belief about God forms the basis for the such determined resolve in verse 1? How does someone gain such deep belief?

- (b) What two points of view are seen in verse 2? How can both co-exist?

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- (c) Verse 1 hinted at the possibility of the Israelites taking God's glory for themselves. Verse 2 spoke of the nations rubbishing God's glory in favour of their idols. Look at the counter-arguments in verses 4-7. What might the idolaters also say of Israel's God? What makes Israel's counter-arguments powerful?

- (d) What, in the end, is wrong with trusting in things other than the LORD?

- (e) Verses 9-11 call upon the various sections of Israel's congregation (Israelites in general, Levites, and God-fearing Gentiles) to trust in the LORD. What do the words 'help' and 'shield' tell us about what they're being asked to trust God for?

- (f) Now look at verses 12-15. How is the blessing talked about here *different* from what God brings to those who trust him in verses 9-11? How do verses 9-15 support the resolve in verse 1 to give glory solely to God?

- (g) What two reasons are given in verses 16-18 for us to praise the LORD forever? How does Jesus' death and resurrection modify this? (Revelation 5: 11-12)⁷

Reflect:

1. In what ways are we at Holy Trinity church tempted to take glory for ourselves?
2. What would it look like for our church congregation to live out this Psalm? (Would things be different?)
3. Though praise is about God, it is not necessarily always directed *to* God. Who are good examples of people who praise God in daily conversation? What can we learn from them?

Application:

Turn to the person beside you and spend one minute praising God (ie., in your speech to them, give God glory for what he has done in your life and in our church).

⁷The present presence of the souls of the martyrs in heaven in Revelation 6: 10-11 indicates that those who die in Christ are in conscious fellowship with him already, but still awaiting bodily resurrection. cf also Philippians 1: 23, John 11: 26

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Study 3: Longing For His Voice

Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is famous for being the longest of the Psalms. For that reason, it's often not read or studied in its entirety. But it is very rich. The form of the Psalm shows that it is carefully written, and is worth reflecting on.⁸ Its theme is the Psalmist's love for God's voice, found in his written word.⁹ In it we discover how valuable God's word is to someone in difficult circumstances.

Discuss: What level of freedom from sin's curse (sin, sickness, poverty, death) can Christians reasonably expect to receive from God prior to Christ's return?

When has this been an issue for you?

Read: Christians rejoice that God has saved them through the sending of his Son as our Saviour. But this raises tension, for 'salvation' in the Bible means more than mere forgiveness (as wonderful as that is). 'Salvation' is from the whole curse of sin, which ultimately includes all sickness, suffering, poverty and death. But it is one thing to be assured of salvation; it is another to be saved but not experience freedom from these evils. This sets up a tension which we see within the book of Psalms itself. On the one hand, Psalm 1 speaks of the righteous man, and says, 'whatever he does he prospers'.¹⁰ On the other, Psalm 73 describes someone whose faith was almost lost when he saw the righteous suffering and the wicked prospering.¹¹

Psalm 119 goes a long way to resolving this tension.

⁸The Psalm is an acrostic poem, written with 22 stanzas corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with each line in each stanza beginning with the letter for that stanza.

⁹God's word is variously described as his word, decrees, precepts, laws, statutes, commands, and promise.

¹⁰Psalm 1: 3

¹¹Psalm 73: 1-3

א, ב - the Tension & the Test Case

- Where do we see the tension coming out in verses 1-5, and what is the Psalmist's intended solution?
- In the next 167 verses, we see a diary of the Psalmist who tries to obey God, in the hope of keeping his way pure of sin, and by doing so, obtain the blessing of God.

What phrases in verses 10-16 describe his effort? (see also verses 55, 62, 147-48)

ג, ד, ז, ח, ט - Evidence of hardship

Select five group members to read verses 17-24, 25-32, 49-56, 57-64 and verses 81-88, with the group listening out for evidence of hardship in the Psalmist's life.

- What evidence is there of hardship? What picture is being painted?
- Is there any indication of the reason he is being persecuted?

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מ - Where is God?

Read verses 73-80.

- To whom is the Psalmist's suffering ultimately attributed?
- What is his attitude towards God amidst his suffering?

ט, ז, ס, נ, צ - Blessing

Read verses 65-72.

- In what way has the Lord blessed the Psalmist through the suffering he has endured? (verses 67, 71)
- What other blessings are evident?
 - Verses 49-50, 147;
 - Verses 98-100;
 - Verse 120;
 - Verse 162

ע, ב - Future Blessings

Read verses 121-136.

- What future blessings does the Psalmist look forward to?

ת - Conclusion

What blessing is there in obeying God's word?

What have you learnt from the Psalmist about the value of meditating on God's word?

Read verses 169-176

- Can we obtain the ultimate blessing by sheer obedience?

Finally, read Psalm 1:1-3, and 1 Peter 2.22-24.

- How does Jesus resolve the tension in this Psalm, of blessing promised to those who obey God's word, yet the realisation that - as much as God does bless us when we try and obey - our obedience will always be flawed?

Talk in twos or threes about how God has spoken to you through this Psalm, and what you resolve to do. Pray for one another.

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Study 4: How Can I Repay The LORD For All His Goodness Towards Me?

Psalm 116

Discuss: Have there been any periods in your life when you have had an acute (and perhaps overwhelming) awareness of your own indebtedness towards God? If so, when?

What is your normal response to God's grace?

- (a) Accept it with thankfulness.
- (b) Want to repay it out of thankfulness.
- (c) Want to repay it out of a sense of duty.
- (d) Take it for granted.

Read Psalm 116.

1. Compare verses 1 and 17-19. What is the movement of the Psalm?

2. Looking back: Recalling God's goodness.
 - What can be gleaned about from verses 1-2 about why the Psalmist loves the Lord?

- Would you say that you 'love the Lord'?
- If this is language that you wouldn't normally use, could you?
- What would it take for you to be able to say it (even silently in your own prayers?)
- Have you ever felt your life threatened or in danger, and then prayed for God to save you (as in verses 3-4)?
- What is meant by the term 'simple-hearted' in verse 6? (Is this a word that could be applied to yourself?)

3. Looking to the present: Reassuring yourself in the Lord.

- What can we learn about the present situation of the Psalmist in verses 7-11?
- How is faith exercised? (How does this parallel for us? cf 2 Corinthians 4: 13-14)

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- What can we learn about how we can minister to ourselves in times of difficulty?

Between the present reassurance and the future, comes an overwhelming sense that God is constantly with the Psalmist right throughout his life, and therefore the question of verse 12: 'How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness towards me?' The Psalmist knows deep in his being that the Lord will continue to be good to him in the future, just as He has been so in the past and present. The question he poses out aloud comes out of a deep sense of gratitude, and indebtedness. He knows of course that he cannot repay the Lord - which begs the question: how can he respond to God's grace?

4. Looking to the future: Calling upon the Lord.

- There is determination in verses 13-14. The setting is congregational. But what is meant by each of the vows made in verse 13?:
 - 'I will lift up the cup of salvation' (cf. Mark 14: 36)
 - 'I will call upon the name of the Lord' (Romans 10: 13, 1 Corinthians 1: 2)

- Look at verses 17-19.
 - What 'thank offerings' can we bring to God today when we meet together as a church?
 - Why is this an appropriate setting?

Application:

In application of verses 17-19, the final Sunday in November will be 'Thanksgiving Sunday', when each of us will have a chance to respond in some way to God's grace, and to do it together.

In gratitude to God, and in response to God's goodness to you (past, present, and future), what vow will you fulfill before the Lord in the presence of all his people?

Together, spend time praising the Lord for his goodness towards you.

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Study 5: Blessed Is He...

Psalm 118

Introduction:

As a child in Sunday school, I was encouraged to sing, 'This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it'. Perhaps you know this song too. But I'd always wonder why we sang that song every Sunday - implying that no one Sunday was more special than the other, meaning that every Sunday was special (so I figured) because it was made by God.

The words of that song are lifted straight from Psalm 118.24, which are immediately preceded by words which speak to us of another day ... 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ...'

PRAY that God would open our eyes to see Christ in his glory.

Read verses 1-4

- As with Psalm 115, the whole congregation (Israelites, priests, and God-fearing Gentiles) are addressed.
- What is implied by the repeated instruction for the congregation to remind each other that God's love endures forever?
- When are we tempted to doubt that God's love endures forever?

- What is the suggested help in times of doubt?

Read verses 5-7

- A literal translation of verse 5 is, 'In my constraint I cried, and he answered by making it roomier'. Think on that verse. Has that ever been your experience?
- What confidences then follow for the Psalmist?

Read verses 10-13

- What happened to the Psalmist? Any idea who this might be?

Read verses 14-16

- What is his final testimony? (verse14)

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- What is the connection between the Lord's salvation of this one person, and the outpouring of national joy?

- Any idea who this person might be?

Read verses 17-21

- Verses 17-18 reveal that the salvation of this person was touch-and-go. What is the setting for his thanks?

Read verses 22-24

- Who, do you think, is speaking, and who are they speaking about?

- What is their conclusion?

Detective work:

When was the day of salvation? (Hint: Did the Jews in Jesus' day see it as a past event, or a future event prophesied in this Psalm? Read verses 25-26, then Mark 11: 1-9).

- So when was the day of salvation? (Acts 4: 9-12)
- How then do we know for sure that God is good and his love endures forever (verse 1), even when events in life may cause us to question this?

Response:

Read verse 27-29.

- What is the collective and individual response to the day of salvation that Christ brings?
- This Sunday, what will this look like for you?

PRAY in line with verse 29.

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