

**Psalm 118:14-26** <sup>14</sup>My strength and song is the LORD, and he has become salvation for me. <sup>15</sup>Loud shouts of victory are heard in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD has done a mighty deed! <sup>16</sup>The right hand of the LORD is lifted high! The right hand of the LORD has done a mighty deed!” <sup>17</sup>I will not die. No, I will live, and I will proclaim the works of the LORD. <sup>18</sup>The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not handed me over to death. <sup>19</sup>Open for me the gates of righteousness. I will enter them. I will give thanks to the LORD. <sup>20</sup>This is the gate to the LORD. The righteous enter it. <sup>21</sup>I will give you thanks, because you answered me, and you have become salvation for me. <sup>22</sup>The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. <sup>23</sup>This is from the LORD. It is marvelous in our eyes. <sup>24</sup>This is the day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. <sup>25</sup>O LORD, please save us now. O LORD, grant us success. <sup>26</sup>Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

What do you think of when you hear the word “Easter”? I would hope that the first thing in all of our minds anyway would be our Savior’s victory over death for us. That’s what today is all about. Maybe you think of getting together with family. It’s always made me smile that the traditional meal for Easter is ham. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament law for us so those dietary laws don’t apply to us anymore. Might as well celebrate our Christian freedom! Maybe you think about how much you like Reese’s eggs. I know I do. Overall, we consider Easter to be a big celebration.

When you read the four Gospels, though, you see that the first Easter was anything but celebratory. The disciples were hiding behind locked doors. If people were willing to kill Jesus what in the world was going to happen to them? The faithful women went out to the tomb first thing in the morning, but they didn’t go there to see a risen Jesus. They went to give him a more fitting burial. When Mary Magdalene saw that his body was not in the tomb, she became afraid that someone had robbed his grave.

Speaking by inspiration many hundreds of years before the first Easter, the writer of this Psalm understood what Easter was going to mean. He may not have known all the fine details about Holy Week, but he knew that God was going to win an eternal victory for every human being. This Is the Day the LORD Has Made so rejoice with the Savior and rejoice because of the Savior.

One thing that you can’t help but notice when you read this Psalm is how many times the name “**the LORD**” comes up. It is used 14 times in these 13 verses alone. That shouldn’t surprise us. Remember what that name means in the Old Testament. English translations typically spell it in all capital letters. That is God’s covenant name. It shows him as the God who makes promises and keeps those promises.

Nowhere is that name more obvious than on Easter Sunday. On this day, the name the LORD is fulfilled. When Adam and Eve first plunged the world into sin, God made the first promise of the Savior. He would be a descendant of Adam and Eve who would crush Satan’s head. When Jesus died on the cross, that promise was kept. If Satan thought he had won, he was quickly proven wrong. Jesus’ resurrection sealed his fate.

In verses 15 and 16 God’s right hand is mentioned, “**<sup>16</sup>The right hand of the LORD is lifted high! The right hand of the LORD has done a mighty deed!**” God is a spirit so technically speaking he does not have a right hand. This is anthropomorphism, applying human characteristics to God. 90% of the population is right handed, so if you are going to get any work done, your right hand will be doing the heavy lifting.

This is showing that work of winning forgiveness and eternal life is not something any human being could do. We need a Savior to be perfect. Since we all inherit sin from our parents, we can’t even dream of perfection. Because of that even if I gave up my life to save someone else, that wouldn’t get me into heaven much less anyone else. All of our efforts are less than worthless.

So God had to do the impossible. Jesus, true God from eternity, needed to become a mortal human being, just like we are. The only difference is that because he is God he wasn’t born with any sin. When Jesus was on the cross he had to suffer the punishment not just for one sinner but for all of us throughout history. The last impossible thing is what happened today—the dead rise. Jesus lives.

Jesus says here, “**<sup>18</sup>The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not handed me over to death.**” Being chastened is basically a synonym for being disciplined. Our parents disciplined us when we were younger so that we would learn right from wrong and so we would be kept from doing things that would otherwise be dangerous for us. We probably didn’t appreciate it at the time, but hopefully we do now.

Jesus obviously didn’t need to be corrected because he was perfect. On the cross, though, God treated him as if he was every sinner rolled up into one. So he disciplined the entire human race through him. When we remember everything that our Savior suffered for us on the cross, that should motivate us to avoid sin and instead live for the Savior who loved us and gave himself for us.

Jesus says, **“<sup>17</sup>I will not die. No, I will live, and I will proclaim the works of the LORD.”** Someone might say, “Well, Jesus did die on Good Friday, didn’t he? How can he say this?” I think King David does a good job of explaining that in Psalm 16, **“you will not abandon my life to the grave. You will not let your favored one see decay.”** What makes death scary for us is that it is the end. We are now going to spend the rest of our lives on this earth without this person.

If that had happened to Jesus, then it would have shown that he was a fraud. That’s why people are so desperately hunting for a tomb for Jesus somewhere in Israel. Then Christianity falls apart. They can search and search until their heads cave in. You can’t find what does not exist. In passages like this one his resurrection is foretold. In passages like the Gospel lesson for today, we see how those prophecies were fulfilled. We worship a living and victorious Savior.

Because of Jesus, those words can be on our lips too. Unless Jesus returns first, I know I’m going to die. But so what. There’s good reason that Jesus compares it to being asleep. It’s only a temporary condition. Just like we wake up in the morning so also on the Last Day Christ will raise our bodies to life again. So we can praise God now and point people to him with the anticipation of being able to praise him perfectly in heaven.

We read, **“<sup>19</sup>Open for me the gates of righteousness. I will enter them. I will give thanks to the LORD. <sup>20</sup>This is the gate to the LORD. The righteous enter it.”** The gate of righteousness is the way that people have access to God. That was pictured by that thick curtain that blocked the way to the Most Holy Place in the Temple. When Jesus died, that curtain was torn in two, showing that absolutely nothing is separating us from God anymore.

I also think of Jesus’ words in John 10, **“Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved.”** That **“gate to the LORD”** is none other than Jesus himself. Through him we can enter God’s presence with any prayer or request we might have. Because of Jesus we will be in his presence forever.

This Is the Day the LORD Has Made so rejoice with the Savior and rejoice because of the Savior.

In this Psalm we have one of the most well-known passages from the Old Testament, one that is quoted or referred to many times in the New Testament, **“<sup>22</sup>The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. <sup>23</sup>This is from the LORD. It is marvelous in our eyes.”** Jesus showed how the religious leaders in Jerusalem were fulfilling the first part of that prophecy.

He said during Holy Week, **“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’ That is why I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruit.”** Because they were rejecting him, God was going to take his Word away from them. That’s a strong warning for us today too so we don’t repeat the same mistake!

The word translated cornerstone could also be translated as capstone. Either way, it is a very important stone—the most important one. Cornerstones these days are decorative. The one at our school isn’t even on the corner! Back then they were extremely important. All the walls of the house would be based off the cornerstone. If that stone wasn’t true, all the walls would be at odd angles and the house wouldn’t last. In the same way, if you remove the capstone from an arch it can no longer bear weight and it will collapse.

That’s how important Jesus is to the Christian Church. He is everything. Without him we have nothing. That’s why Easter is so important. If Jesus is dead and in the grave, Christianity is an utterly worthless waste of time. But Jesus is very much alive. His perfect life, death, and resurrection are the only things that can make us God’s people and keep us as God’s people.

So today we join in the song of praise in verse 24, **“<sup>24</sup>This is the day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”** That’s why we’re here today. We left church on Good Friday and everything seemed so dark. All the hymns were sad and in a minor key. We come back on Easter and everything is bright. After going a month and a half without singing Alleluia, our hymns today are jam packed with them. We praise God for raising Jesus from the dead so that we have real life and purpose.

Because of Jesus, we don’t have to just say this about Easter Sunday. Every day we can say, **“<sup>24</sup>This is the day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”** Easter changes everything for the better. Even if you’re having the worst day of your life, it is still a day the LORD has made. We can be confident because we know that this problem is only temporary. Jesus took care of our biggest problems—sin and death. If those are gone, no other problem can harm us either.

Let me give you a silly little example. The week before last I did my taxes. That's nobody's idea of a good time except maybe a CPA. Between that and my quarterly payment I sent enough money to the Fed to buy a decent used car. Rather than get upset about that I can look at it through the lens of Easter. Paying taxes means that God blessed me with a job this year—and not just any job, the best one. I can show my thankfulness for my Savior by obeying the fourth commandment. Because of Easter I can see that as a privilege instead of a pain.

In the end of this text we actually get a flashback to last Sunday, Palm Sunday. The crowds used these words to praise Jesus, “<sup>25</sup>**O LORD, please save us now.**” Maybe you don't remember hearing those exact words, but you know them in Hebrew. The phrase “**please save us now**” is “Hosanna.” It started out as a prayer to God to save them. Eventually it was used as a prayer to thank the God who has saved us.

The one that I know we heard is, “<sup>26</sup>**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.**” Remember what we mean by “**the name of the LORD.**” It's more than just the four letters that make up that name. It is what the Bible says about him. It is what he has done for us. Earlier I showed how that is God's covenant name. So when they said that Jesus is coming in the name of the LORD, they are saying that he is coming to fulfill all those promises that God has made.

We will join our voices with believers throughout all of history by singing those words today. Actually we sing them every time we celebrate Holy Communion here. The words “Hosanna” and “<sup>26</sup>**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD**” are a part of the liturgy that we call the Sanctus, which means “Holy.” So we are using the words of Psalm 118 to thank our Savior for everything he did on Holy Week and for giving us his true body and blood once again in the Sacrament.

This text concludes with, “**We bless you from the house of the LORD.**” Every time we come to church we have an opportunity to praise and thank our risen and victorious Savior. But we don't have to wait until Sunday morning or Monday night to do that. As I mentioned before, Easter changes every day for the better. In good times, praise the Savior who has blessed us. In bad times, praise the Savior who is using this problem to draw us closer to him. We can join in the prayer in the first and last verses of this Psalm, “**Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.**”

This Is the Day the LORD Has Made so rejoice with the Savior and rejoice because of the Savior. So many times we wish we could have seen these big events from our Savior's ministry with our own eyes. Today I'm glad that we can't. We don't have to cry uncontrollably like Mary Magdalene. We don't have to cower in fear like the disciples. We can live freely and confidently because our Champion, our Savior has won! We are free today and eternally.