

This Is The Day That the Lord Has Made

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by David Schrock

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. – Psalm 118:24 –

Like many, I learned this verse not from reading it in the Bible but singing it in church. Les Garrett's chorus, "This is the Day," is a popular praise song that sets this verse to music. My wife and I have taught this song to our kids, and it is not unusual to find myself singing this little song.

However, as with every verse in the Bible, context determines meaning. And left to itself, Psalm 118:24 and Les Garrett's modern rendition can make it seem that we are giving thanks to God for the day in which we stand—"this day"—and not the day that is actually foretold in Psalm 118.

When Psalm 118 is read in its entirety, however, it becomes apparent that the day mentioned in verse 24 is the Day of the Lord. How do we know?

Well, two verses earlier stands another well-known verse, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (v. 22). Picked up in the New Testament (Mark 12:10–11; 1 Pet 2:4–7), it refers to Jesus Christ and his death. Thus, set in the historical context of the work of Christ, the "day that the Lord has made" is not just the day in which we stand—it is the day that God's Son fell!

In Mark 14:26, the Bible says, "When they sang a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Previously, Mark records the Lord's Supper where Jesus broke bread and drank wine, both representing the death he would die on the next day (14:22–25). Thus, the hymn they sang is probably Psalm 118, the closing hymn of the Jewish Seder—the meal commemorating the Passover.

How marvelous it is to consider the placement of this verse in the events around Jesus' death. As the disciples of Christ concluded their Passover meal, which Jesus transformed into his own Lord's Supper, this song would be sung to prepare for "the day." As Psalm 118:23 puts it: "This is the Lord's doing, how marvelous it is in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

For us, two thousand years removed, the context makes all the difference in how we join in the chorus praising God. Do we rejoice in our day, the one in which we stand? Or do we rejoice in that day when Christ died so that we could stand? Hedonists easily rejoice in the pleasures of a good day, and stoics can convince themselves in the midst of difficulty that something good will come in this day.

But only gospel-loving Christians have a secure reason for rejoicing in any day and everyday. If the physical resurrection of Jesus did not happen, then Christians are to be deluded and damned. But because the eye witnesses account for Christ's empty tomb, we call the Friday that Jesus died "good." We do not sing songs saying that every day is good; we rejoice everyday because God is good.

It needs to be said that the God of the Bible is not the God of Ned Flanders, who might pedantically praise Jesus for even the worst days. God does not call his followers to mindlessly call bad days “good” and to reinforce their joy by songs that grate against reality.

Rather, the message of the Bible, the message of Good Friday, and the message of Psalm 118:24 is this: We can rejoice in any day because the worst day in the history of the world—the day on which the Son of God died—became the best day in the history of the world. Because of this day and the ensuing resurrection of Christ we can rejoice in any day.

As we celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, let us sing with all our might that “This is the Day that the Lord has made,” but remember what day we are singing about. The reason why we rejoice in this today is because of that day when the sky grew black, the earth quaked, the temple veil tore, and the Son died.

This was the Day of the Lord, when Christ Jesus laid down his life, so that sinners could be reconciled to their Maker. This is the good news, and this is the reason why we rejoice and sing!

Soli Deo Gloria, ds