

Is This Your Testimony? (Psalm 116)

1. The testimony of a saint reflects on whom he loves (v.1-2)

- The Psalmist begins by declaring the object of his affection. While the command to love the LORD was prescribed in the Torah (Deut. 6:4), it could never force anyone to love the LORD, for love must be volitional, absent of threats or rewards.
 - When love can justify itself with reason, it demonstrates a deep-abiding principle, for love is not blind. The eyes of love are “wide open.”
- Only the grace of God and consequent responsive thanksgiving can produce this love.
- The Psalmist loves the LORD because the LORD heard his voice and pleads for mercy.
 - The LORD inclined His “ear” to the lament of the Psalmist. God is always available and never tires of hearing, as we are not burdensome to Him.
- The heart of loving affection is established in the LORD’s availability, willingness, and mercy to give help in times of need. As a result, he will call on the LORD all his days.

2. The testimony of a saint remembers where he was (v.3)

- The Psalmist remembers the time(s) when death was “knocking” at his door. This is a euphemism, as Sheol is mentioned as a synonym for death.
- Whatever he was experiencing, there was tremendous distress and anguish as though the cords of death entangled him.
 - There was an inability to alter, change, or remove himself from his predicament. What he experienced was not far removed from him but personal.
 - This is a double lament as distress refers to “heavy” trouble, and anguish refers to sorrow and grief.
- We are not given any additional details about the situation of the Psalmist other than his lament and the heaviness of his soul as he suffered despair.

3. The testimony of a saint recalls what he did in his despair (v.4)

- In his distress, he called on the name of the LORD. The “name of the LORD” is used over one hundred times in the Old Testament with variations that reflect the character of God.
 - El Shaddai: “The All Sufficient One, Lord-God Almighty” (Genesis 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3), El Elyon: “The Most-High God” (Gen. 14:18, 19, 20; Ps. 57:2; 78:35), YHWH Nissi: “The LORD is my banner” (Ex. 17:15), YHWH RAAH: “The LORD my Shepherd” (Ps. 23), YHWH Rapha: “The LORD who heals (Ex. 15:26), YHWH Shammah: “The LORD is there” (Ex. 48:35), YHWH Tsidkenu: “The LORD our righteousness (Jer. 23:6), YHWH Medkoddishkem: “The LORD who sanctifies you” (Ex. 31:13), YHWH (Covenant-Keeping), etc.
- While we are not informed of what “title” the Psalmist used to speak of God’s character or name, it is unnecessary.
- In contrition and humility, the Psalmist utters a short, powerful, and earnest request. It is the cry of a man who is desperate for help. He turns to the LORD and no other.

4. The testimony of a saint recounts what he learned or reaffirmed about God (v.5-8)

- A. The LORD is gracious (v.5a): to show favor, often in dealing with the poor and needy (Ex. 22:27). It can refer to the “bending” or “stooping” in the kindness of a superior to an inferior. It is the “name” YHWH attributes to Himself as He passed before Moses, hiding behind the cleft of a rock (Ex. 34:6). This Hebrew word is more expansive and extensive than merely “unmerited favor” as it is often linked with compassion and mercy (2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17, 31; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2)

B. The LORD is righteous (v.5b):

- He always does what is right according to His character and cannot deviate from acting justly. He has integrity and equity in all His counsel, words, and actions (often used in judgment and enacting vengeance).

C. The LORD is merciful (v.5c):

- Used interchangeably with compassion and the quality of character God was pleased to announce to Moses (Ex. 34:6).

D. The LORD preserves the simple (v.6a):

- Preserving is the “guarding, keeping watch over, and protection” of the simple, which is a mark of the graciousness of God.
- In poetic and wisdom literature, it means “foolish, open-minded, naïve, or easily led astray” (Ps. 19:7; 116:6; 119:130; Prov. 1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 6, 16; 14:15, 18; 21:11; 22:3; 27:12). The Psalmist acknowledges his “simple ways.”

E. The LORD saved me (v.6b): He did not pass him by nor allow the Psalmist to be “ruined.” In his “low” estate, God showered mercy on him.

The circumstances surrounding the Psalmist appear to be, in some varying degrees, “childlike ignorance” or “foolish choices.” Regardless, God has given him rest by preserving him (v.8). This “rest” can refer to the end of foolish ignorance, vain efforts of self-righteousness, alarms of the conscience, fear of temporal punishment, or the uncertainty of mind.

5. The testimony of a saint responds with a thankful heart (v.9-12-19)

- The Psalmist resolves to walk before the LORD in the land of the living (v.9). He can walk because the LORD protected him from ruin (v.3, 6, 8).
 - He returns to hasty conclusions while his soul is in distress. He called “all men liars” as a premature conclusion.
 - Those who speak in haste with a loose tongue often follow with bitter repentance. The irony is that he was also a deceived, disgruntled liar.
 - The Psalmist is not a victim necessarily, as he was a simple-minded, foolish, discouraged, and downcast man. In distress, he blame-shifted.
- Regardless of his shortcomings, the soul of the Psalmist is rejuvenated, desiring to thank the LORD for all His benefits (v.12). He departs from fretting, assumption, concerns, and troubles to a God-ward focus, transitioning from cheerlessness to cheerfulness.
- God’s benefits are so numerous that the Psalmist desires some outlet.
- He will “lift up the cup of salvation,” an allusion to the temple, where meat, drink, and other sacrificial offerings are given. This “cup” may allude to the “cup of libation” (Num. 28:7) that was filled with wine and poured on the altar after a sacrifice, thus demonstrating dedication (Num. 28:7; Phil. 2:17).
 - The cup of salvation is a euphemism for deliverance. The Psalmist will worship the LORD for saving him, not by offering a bull, goat, or lamb (Lev. 7:12; 22:29; Ps. 50:14, 23) but by giving the LORD his heart in a greater measure.
- Thankfulness to God for His deliverance after regeneration and throughout the believer’s life grows in proportion to the awareness of his past sinfulness, present iniquity, and God’s goodness. As the saint matures, he has more to be thankful for.
- God’s character motivates and spurs the forgiven and redeemed saint to live for Him.
- An honest soul will never conceal what belongs to God as a debtor to His mercy. While mercy came to him in secret, praise will be rendered in public. He will pay (fulfill) his vows before the LORD in the presence of all his people (v.14, 18).
- The testimony of the Psalmist is public, as thankfulness is tangible and expressive. No thankful saint will have a dead, silent, and anemic testimony to the world, for the greater awareness of the deliverance, the more God-ward the praise is.