

# And After Singing A Hymn Part II

*Trusting the Name Amidst the Snares of Death*

**Psalm 115:1** Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

<sup>2</sup> Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"

<sup>3</sup> Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

<sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

<sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

<sup>6</sup> They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

<sup>7</sup> They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.

<sup>8</sup> Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

<sup>9</sup> O Israel, **trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.**

<sup>10</sup> O house of Aaron, **trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.**

<sup>11</sup> You who fear the LORD, **trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.**

<sup>12</sup> The LORD has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron;

<sup>13</sup> he will bless those who fear the LORD, both the small and the great.

<sup>14</sup> May the LORD give you increase, you and your children!

<sup>15</sup> May you be **blessed by the LORD**, who made heaven and earth!

<sup>16</sup> The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.

<sup>17</sup> The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.

<sup>18</sup> But we will **bless the LORD** from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!

**Psalm 116:1** I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

<sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore **I will call on him** as long as I live.

<sup>3</sup> The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.

<sup>4</sup> Then **I called on the name of the LORD**: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"

<sup>5</sup> Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.

<sup>7</sup> Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

<sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;

<sup>9</sup> I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

<sup>10</sup> I believed, even when I spoke: "I am greatly afflicted";

<sup>11</sup> I said in my alarm, "All mankind are liars."

<sup>12</sup> What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?

<sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation and **call on the name of the LORD**,

<sup>14</sup> **I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.**

<sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

<sup>16</sup> O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds.

<sup>17</sup> I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and **call on the name of the LORD.**

<sup>18</sup> **I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,**

<sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

## Psalms 115-116

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# A Bad Day

MAYBE YOU HAVE HAD A BAD WEEK, or month, or year ... or life (I hope not). Do you ever get down on yourself? Do you ever wonder how in the world you will ever get through it (whatever “it” is for you: the next test, the bully you have to see in school every day, the sudden death of a family member, the nervousness about your next paycheck or insurance or how you will possibly pay off your debts, difficulties in your marriage, the disease with which God has afflicted you, the long drawn-out road of downhill health decline that is inevitably leading to you or your loved one’s end?

In all these things to which we are predisposed not only to worry, but to lose hope, **I wonder if you have ever had it this bad.** A certain man tells his true story:

With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift

at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

(2Co 11:23-28)

That man was, of course, the apostle **Paul**. But he's not the only one who's probably had a few worse days than you. We learn in another place about various people who lived even longer ago than Paul.

Some were tortured ... Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated ... wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

(Heb 11:35-38)

In the same place, Hebrews remembers some who were thrown to lions, were under the duress of the war, had their own children die before their eyes (33-35), and there are many more things we could recount. *Any of one those things* I would consider to be the worst day of my life.

So, what is there that could possibly make a person not only get through such things, but actually *be willing* to undergo them intentionally? That's a little different than my questions to you, but it is related. It is rare in our day to see anyone seek suffering (except for maybe someone with a martyr complex whose goal is actually to gain sympathy for himself). But in days gone by, this was common. Though, I should say they didn't go looking for it for its own sake (most of the time), they nevertheless embraced it with open arms, even as they knew that certain things that they did would very well lead to this kind of outcome.

This is a thing *foreign to our hedonistic culture* saturated in amusement, recreation, and pleasure. Misery is that last thing we want; and yet I dare say we are the most miserable people that has ever lived. We have lots of stuff, but are totally unsatisfied. Our 5,000 relationships have maxed out our Facebook, but we have no friends. We live in the silent

cacophony of our own thoughts hour after hour, day after day. When we finally find ourselves around others, everyone begins to talk or yell, while the only thing that listens is the walls. We are in the wealthiest, most scientifically advanced, technologically savvy place in history, but we seem always to be looking for greener pastures. We seem desperately unable to relax, to breathe, to enjoy, to be happy. What is wrong with us?

“‘Rejoice in the LORD always,’ again I say, ‘Rejoice.’” That’s what it says. How on earth can I do that? “Hallelujah, praise the Lord!” *But I don’t feel like praising the Lord. He can’t possibly expect me to do that. Can he? Seriously? when my life is like this.*

Friends, we may be plugged in, but we’re completely disconnected. To what? To the Faith of our Fathers that filled their hearts with joy in the midst of sorrow, with happiness in the middle of suffering, with pleasure while under intense pain and duress and problems. Is there a solution? There is. Let’s discover it together.

## The Third Stanza

When I was a kid, we always sang hymns from a hymnbook. Sort of. It seemed, without fail, that we would always **skip the third verse**. I never understood why. Was there something wrong with it? Was it poisonous, too hot to handle, too cold to hold? If it was that bad, why did the hymn writer (or at least the hymnal organizers) always seem to put a third verse in there? I never understood this, but that was the custom.

Right now, we are in the middle of a six-psalm set called the **Egyptian Hallel**. As we saw last week, the Jews told us that these songs were **sung each year during Passover**. In fact, this is still the custom to this day. We saw that the Passover meal (you may have heard of it as a Seder) was a long, drawn-out affair which actually contained a whole litany of events (see the list in the previous sermon). At one point fairly early on, **Psalms 113-114** would be sung. Then, much later, **Psalms 115-118** were sung. I don't want you to think of Psalms 115-116 as a kind of "third verse" of the hymnal. They must not get lost in the shuffle, which could be quite easy, given that 117 is famous for being the shortest

chapter in the Bible and 118 reaches that crescendo as being the Psalm that was sung when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

These songs are very important. The first is what I'm going to call "A Call to Trust the Name of the LORD." Imagine it beginning with a loud trumpet call, to get your attention. "Hear ye, hear ye. There is nothing more important that you can do in all the world than this!" The second is what I'm going to call "Amidst the Snares of Death." Coming on the heels of the first song, this one teaches you why it is so important to Call upon the Name of the LORD: because bad times are coming, like it or not. They may even be here. And how will you be able to get through them, even more, to be satisfied in God in them?

But left here, we could end up missing the bigger, more important point. For, if you hear how I just put this and think that this is all about you and your doing, you would be gravely mistaken. Here again, the context of the Jewish liturgy that we just spoke of, that we saw last time, becomes so important. For these are songs that Jesus sang the last night of his life. This time the events of evening's discussion about being betrayed and everyone wondering who it was are not coming up for Jesus after the song (as they were with

113-114). That is now past. What Jesus has on his mind now is actually **preparing himself, and his friends**, for his betrayal and the subsequent arrest, his trial, and his capital punishment for a crime he did not commit. He knows this is coming. And these songs are ringing in his ears even as they are on his lips.

## **Psalm 115: A Call to Trust the Name of the LORD**

Psalm 115, like 116, like almost all of the Psalms, is **chiastic**. As always, this helps us understand the central point, even while helping us compare and contrast things to gain a better understanding of its message.

- A.** Give glory to the Name of the LORD (115:1)
- B.** Where is their God? He is in heaven (2-4)
- C.** They **trust** in idols (4-8)
- C<sup>1</sup>.** We **trust** in the LORD (9-11)
- B<sup>1</sup>.** The LORD has been mindful of us, the LORD of the heavens (12-16)
- A<sup>1</sup>.** Praise the Lord (17-18)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Miller (*ALittlePerspective*), has a little longer structure, but it matches the basic center of the *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (which I have simplified, but kept the basic outline). Her's is:

*A/A<sup>1</sup>-Glorify the LORD, Glorify the Name of the LORD*

This outline shows that the song, in one way, is very simple to understand. It **begins and ends with praise**. The first verse is the Psalmist's cry to the LORD. **"Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your Name give glory"** (Ps 115a). We saw last time how "the Name," such a major focus of Psalm 113, is not an abstraction, not a mere label given to describe God, but is actually embodied in the Second Person of the Godhead in both Testaments. This means we could as Christians say, **"Father, glorify your Son."** This is language Jesus used of himself (John 17:1).<sup>2</sup>

A reason is given. **"For the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!"** (Ps 115:1b). Here is the *hesed*

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- A. The glory due to the Name of the LORD (1-2)
  - B. But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases (3)
  - C. Idols are the word of men's hands (4-7)
  - D. Those who make and trust in them are like them (8)
  - E. Israel, Aaron, those who fear: Trust in the LORD (9-11)
  - F. The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us (12a)
  - E<sup>1</sup>. He will bless Israel, Aaron, those who fear Him (12b-13)
  - D<sup>1</sup>. May the Lord give you increase, you and your children (14)
  - C<sup>1</sup>. May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth (15)
  - B<sup>1</sup>. Heaven, heavens are the Lord's; the earth has been given to men (16)
  - A<sup>1</sup>. Let us give the Lord the glory due Him (17-18a)

**Conclusion:** Hallelujah!

<sup>2</sup> Not coincidentally, Jesus says in the same place, **"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world"** (John 17:6). Why? Because he is the Name of God to us.

returning, the **covenantal love** of God. What it teaches you is that before all other things, not for your sake, but for his own Name's glory, God enters into covenant and is faithful. This is the character and nature of God. You have to know this in order to do what the song says with it.

Nevertheless, we are the beneficiaries of God's covenantal love and his commitment to glorify his Name. For it, the song ends with a similar idea, but now rather than God glorifying himself, as imagers, "**we**" follow suit. "**The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD (Hallelujah)!" (17-18).**

### *B/B<sup>1</sup>-Where is Their God?*

With this thought, to transition to the second of three parts of the structure, **a question** seems natural to me here. **What if someone won't praise God?** More specifically, what if God's people are not full of praise, but curses; not joy, but sorrow; not contentment, but malcontent? What if we are not a worshiping people, but a people who feel utterly thankless because of life's circumstances?

I ask because a question is raised in the second verse. “Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’” (Ps 115:2). Perhaps the nations ask this because the people won’t praise. Perhaps the people feel as if God isn’t doing anything to help them. Thus, they act like atheists and give others a reason to blaspheme.

Does God refuse to glorify his Name? Of course not. Does he show covenantal love and faithfulness? Yes. Therefore, you, as mirrors (remember the previous sermon about mirroring God), are to reflect God in this way. You are to act like your God, praising his Name, even if you don’t *feel* like it. Why?

Again, why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Now the song teaches some more. What God? **The God of the heavens!** “Our God is in the heavens” (3a). What does this mean? “He does all that he pleases.” Theology! It can set your emotions straight. Here it teaches you what God is like, in this case, his **omnipotence**. God does anything that pleases him. Literally anything. Nothing is too hard for him. He creates, he redeems, he saves, he helps, he defends, he judges. He does all his holy will. You may not feel it at times, but this is what the Scripture teaches here.

In the structure of the song, the parallel is vv. 12-16. Where is their God? “The LORD has remembered us” (12a). It tells you exactly what this means. But this isn’t that God had a bad memory, and suddenly “remembered” that you were there. Remembering here is pouring out favor. Blessing becomes the main point repeated four times in the next two verses.

- He will bless us (12b)
- He will bless the house of Israel (12c)
- He will bless the house of Aaron (12d)
- He will bless those who fear the LORD, both the small and the great (13)

The “us” is all encompassing, and is followed by three specifics. “The house of Israel.” In the OT, this meant the physical nation. Now, remember, another part of the larger context of these songs is that they are singing them as they are returning from captivity. This is not a promise of absolute unconditional non-interrupted prosperity. The captivity was brutal and was in fact punishment for their sins. Nevertheless, God is faithful to his covenant, and he

brought them back when they didn't even deserve it. He was once more blessing them.

Specifically, he was blessing them through the “house of Aaron.” What is this? This is the priestly line. And this was manifesting itself in the rebuilding of the temple. It is said that most of the tribes lost their identity during those 70 years. But not the Priestly line. They kept their genealogies. They knew who they were. And proper worship was now being reinstated and all the people were being blessed.

The third group, in my opinion, is the idyllic summary of these others. “Those who fear the LORD.” It includes anyone: both small and great. And it gets at the heart of what we will talk about in a slightly different way in the next song. For, the physical people and priests were never to be an end to themselves. They pointed towards the spiritual reality of each, which the NT explains is in the born-again people of God who are the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) and “a royal priesthood” (1Pe 2:9). The very same language as the Psalm, but in its fuller color.

The song has a specific blessing that is mentioned next. “May the LORD give you increase, you and your children!” (14). It is a lovely blessing, isn't it? One that he has granted

over and over again in the giving of children. And one that you need to prayerfully believe as God's people—that he *will* bless them. Pray to that end, especially that God will, through the means of you and his church, save them.

But a thought occurred to me. What if he doesn't give me children, or the number of children that I want, or something else? The next part can help. “**May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth!**” (15). The key here is not the blessing part, but *the God of the blessing*: He made heaven and earth. It returns to that theology! It teaches you what God is like, again his omnipotence. He hasn't given you children? He is omnipotent.

There is a chiasm here:

- A. You and your Children (14)
- B. LORD of heaven and earth (15)
- B<sup>1</sup>. Heavens are the LORD's (16a)
- A<sup>1</sup>. Earth is the children of man's (16b)

How does this help? It reminds you that God not only made heaven, heaven belongs to him. This is one of the parallels. This means the supernatural heavenly power to do anything

he wants. Remember Hannah last week? Remember Mary? Barren. Virgin. God has done amazing things in this world, and he gives the earth to the children of man.

“Children” is the **second** parallel. All are God’s offspring (**Acts 17:29**). He has filled the earth with us. But if you are in Christ, you are his very special child, his firstborn, for you are in The Firstborn, hidden and clothed. I recently heard that through scientific developments, the oldest couple in modern history gave birth to a boy. They are an Indian family. She is 72. He is 78. She gave birth, it was not a C-section. It was their child. God has given the earth to men and we have figured out incredible things, almost miraculous things. This shows his providential love for us. How much more, does he love you, even if he doesn’t give you what you want?

### *C/C<sup>1</sup>-You Become What You Worship*

But this begs the question. **Are you his special child?** The third and center part of the song is the lengthy **vv. 4-11**. It is divided into two halves. The first half is about **idols**. This is not the word in the second commandment (*pesel*), but

nevertheless does refer to the physical statues (*atsab*).<sup>3</sup> This is obvious from what it says. It takes the anthropomorphic features of the statues and mocks them:

- They have mouths, but do not speak (Ps 115:5a)
- Eyes, but do not see (5b)
- They have ears, but do not hear (6a)
- Noses, but do not smell. (6b)
- They have hands, but do not feel (7a)
- Feet, but do not walk (7b)
- And they do not make a sound in their throat (7c)

Curiously, this seems to form a chiasm with the words just prior to and after the list completes (and for a guy who can't smell, it is all the more interesting):

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<sup>3</sup> One dictionary says, “The priesthoods of the ancient Near East distinguished between the cult statue fashioned by human hands and the divinity, which, it was believed, could be made to reside within—but not only within—the cult statue (DIETRICH & LORETZ 1992:20–37). However, many of the common people with whom Israelites came into contact did not always distinguish between the divinity and the cult statue. It should not be surprising, therefore, that especially in the heat of religious polemic reflected in Pss 115 and 135, the Israelite polemicist should poke fun at this aspect of the popular religion of peoples of the ancient Near East. M. I. Gruber, “Azabbim,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 127. Gruber points out that sometimes the word does mean both the statue and the god that resides in it (Jer 50:2; Isa 11:10), but other times, like this, is probably does not (cf. Ps 135:15; Isa 42:6). It is more polemical-mocking in nature to show the absurdity of unbelief.

- A. <sup>4</sup> Their **idols** are silver and gold,
- B. the **work of human hands**.
- C. <sup>5</sup> They have **mouths**, but do not **speak**;
- D. **eyes**, but do not **see**.
- E. <sup>6</sup> They have **ears**, but do not **hear**;
- F. **noses**, but do not **smell**.
- E<sup>1</sup>. <sup>7</sup> They have **hands**, but do not **feel**;
- D<sup>1</sup>. **feet**, but do not **walk**;
- C<sup>1</sup>. and they do not make a **sound** in their **throat**.
- B<sup>1</sup>. <sup>8</sup> **Those who make them** become like them;
- A<sup>1</sup>. so do all who **trust** in them.<sup>4</sup>

The effect of this chiasm is to take you to its beginning its end. The work of human hands are idols. What is the parallel? Those who make them demonstrate their trust in them. Even more, **they become like them**: mute, blind, deaf, hyposmic (you can't smell), desensitized, lame, silent. To what? To the truth of the things around them. To the things of God. To the reality of the invisible world. To the order and goodness and Source of this one.

What do you end up with? You end up with a condition exactly as I described at the beginning of this sermon. And

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<sup>4</sup> Alden, "Chiastic Psalms (III)," 206.

yes, I'm saying that this condition(s) is chiefly a symptom of worshiping something other than God, the work of your own making, the idols of your own heart. We stop opening our mouths as witnesses to God's glory. We become **blind to his good providence**. We are **deaf to the solutions he has in his word**, often that he communicates through his saints. We can't **smell the death** we are becoming. We are **desensitized to truth**. We become **paralyzed to fears** and doubts and anxieties. We become **silent about the things of God**. This is the universal witness of the Scriptures. It is the result of idolatry.

What is the key to solving the problem? We'll look at the other half of the center of this song, and then move to the next. There is an antithesis going on between trusting in idols and "**trusting**" in the LORD. Faith!

- **Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them (Ps 115:8)**
- **I Israel, trust in the LORD (vs. 9a)**

It says something specific about him. The object of your trust is Yahweh the "shield."

- He is their [Israel's] help and their shield (9)
- He is their [Aaron] help and their shield (10)
- He is their [all who fear the LORD] help and their shield (11)

We already saw these three groups (vv. 12-13). We saw that he promised to bless them. But this blessing rests upon the foundation of faith in the Name, faith in Christ. The Father blesses through Christ. Faith is the instrument through which God makes a person his special child. And what this faith does for them is teaches them that he is absolutely their Great Protector in all things. No matter what. He shields them from all harm, no matter what kinds of things may bring them hurt. What do I mean? Now we need to turn to the complementary song: Psalm 116.

## Psalm 116: Amidst the Snares of Death

Psalm 116 has a very different flavor. It is a song for “mercy” (116:1) because “the snares of death encompassed me” (3). While it is still a “hallelujah” song (the end of vs. 18), it is much more a crying out to God. It has close affinities to the Last Supper. “I will offer to you the

sacrifice...” (17) and “I will lift up the cup of salvation” (13). The idea of the body and the blood are thus easily seen. Again, its structure is chiasmic.

- A. The LORD hears my voice (1)
- B. I call on the LORD (2)
- C. Cords of death compassed me (3)
- D. I call on the Name of the LORD (4-5)
- E. He saved me (6)
- F. The LORD dealt bountifully (7)
- G. You saved me from death (8)**
- G<sup>1</sup>. You let me live (9-11)**
- F<sup>1</sup>. All God’s bounty (12)
- E<sup>1</sup>. The cup of salvation (13a)
- D<sup>1</sup>. I call on the Name of the LORD (13b-14)
- C<sup>1</sup>. You saved me from the bonds of death (15-16)
- B<sup>1</sup>. I call on the Name of the LORD (17)
- A<sup>1</sup>. I pay my vows to the LORD (18-19)<sup>5</sup>

It begins with a confession of love. “I love the LORD” (Ps 116:1). But why? “Because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.” “He inclined his ear to me, therefore I

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<sup>5</sup> Alden, 206.

will call on him as long as I live” (2). There is again a smaller structure:

- A. I love the LORD
- B. He has heard my pleas for mercy
- B<sup>1</sup>. He inclined his ear to me
- A<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, I will call on him forever

In other words, a confession of loving for the LORD is able to be demonstrated publicly. You prove it by calling on him forever. No matter what.

Taking the parallel at the end of the poem, it adds to this. “I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD” (18-19). “I will pay my vows to the presence of all his people” is actually a kind of chorus that was first spoken in vs. 14 and repeats itself verbatim here. So not only is loving the LORD proven by calling upon him, it is demonstrated by paying your vows, and doing it publicly.

The main vow is probably worship. But worship is something that is extended to all of life. Therefore, more

generally we could say that it is obeying God and doing what he commands. In this way, we are starting to build to Psalm 119.

All of this is important because of what comes next:

- The snare of death encompassed me (3)
- the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me
- I suffered distress and anguish

A moment ago I said, “**No matter what.**” Now you know why. But look at what the song does next. It reinforces calling upon the LORD. Another structure is created:

- A. I will call on him as long as I live (2)
- B. The snares of death encompassed me (3)
- A<sup>1</sup>. Then I called on the Name of the LORD (4)

Amazingly, the same thing repeats itself later in the song, but with a slightly different emphasis:

- A.** I life up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD (13-14)
- B.** Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints (15)
- B<sup>1</sup>.** But you saved me from the bonds (16)
- A<sup>1</sup>.** Thus, I call on the Name of the LORD (17)

The good news of the song is, though the snares or “cords” (NAS) of death encompassed him (3), He is saved from their bonds (17), even though the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the LORD.

Of course, we must spend a moment on vs. 16. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” Ambrose writing in the late fourth century says:

By the death of the martyrs, religion has been defended, the faith spread and the church strengthened. The dead have been victorious, and the persecutors have been vanquished. Accordingly, we celebrate the deaths of those of whose lives we know nothing. So, too, David in prophecy rejoiced at the departure of his own soul, saying, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints.” He held death in more esteem than life. The death itself of the martyrs is the prize

of life. Furthermore, even the hatreds of enemies are dissolved by death.

(ON HIS BROTHER SATYRUS 2.45)

Arthur Pink makes it more applicable to you:

THIS is one of the many comforting and blessed statements in Holy Scripture concerning that great event from which the flesh so much shrinks. If the Lord's people would more frequently make a prayerful and believing study of what the Word says about their departure out of this world, death would lose much if not all its terrors for them. But alas, instead of doing so, they let their imaginations run riot, give way to carnal fears, and walk by sight instead of by faith. Looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance, let us endeavor to dispel, by the light of Divine revelation, some of the gloom unbelief casts around the death of even a Christian.<sup>6</sup>

**Vs. 6** tells us, “The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.” This, of course, is parallel to what we have just seen later in the song. “I will lift up the cup of salvation ... you have loosed my bond.” But now, we

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, *Comfort for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), 86.

are beginning to get very close to the heart of the song, and this seems as good a place as any to begin shifting our focus for a moment.

**The cup of salvation.** We read in the NT, “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins ... and when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt 26:27-28, 30; cf. Mark 14:23-24; 26). So, Jesus has just taken the cup from the end of the Passover meal and infused it with new meaning. Then they immediately sing a song about the cup of salvation!

In this way, Psalm 116 reinforces—for them and for you—what Jesus was about to do. And what was that? In 2 Corinthians 3, the Apostle starts talking much about “the new covenant.” It is a covenant of the Spirit’s ministry (2Co 3:3), rather than the Law’s ministry. In this way, it is a covenant of life rather than a covenant of death (3:6). However, the Apostle says, “He is the one who is being led unto death and suffers in Christ’s triumphal procession

(2:14).<sup>7</sup> The sufferings of Christ are now being owned by the Apostle. Yet, he praises God in the midst of being lead to his death because through these deaths, the Corinthians may live (2:12-17).

Yet, it is important to understand, the Apostle does not stop talking about his own suffering. “[Paul] feels ‘afflicted in every way ... perplexed ... persecuted ... struck down ... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus’ (2Co 4:8-11).” Ah, just like us! So how does he defeat it? “Despite his declared weakness, Paul triumphantly states that he is not undone since the power of God is at work in his life and in the lives of others to whom he ministers (2Co 4:7-10).”<sup>8</sup>

One can almost hear Paul saying to himself, “Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you” (Psalm 116:7), and again, “What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?” (12). Why would I make such a connection to this penultimate-middle section of Psalm 116? This is where things start to get *really* interesting.

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<sup>7</sup> H. H. Drake Williams III, “The Psalms in 1 and 2 Corinthians,” in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 173 (he has a larger, helpful, though not complete like we are looking at here discussion on pp. 173-76.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 174.

While there are certain allusions and echoes of Psalms 115-116 in the NT, there is only **one true quotation**. It comes, not accidentally, in 2 Corinthians 4, right in the place he has been talking about the new covenant, the very thing Jesus enacted at his death in the cup, the very thing about which he began to sing with his Disciples from Psalm 116 immediately after he gave the cup to them. He says, “**Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we also speak**” (2Cor 4:13). He refers to a person’s belief, their trust, just like our first psalm today.

What Paul quotes is found in **Psalm 116:10**. He quotes the LXX version of this verse almost exactly. But there are some really curious things about all. Here are some of them. **First**, this verse is found in **the dead center** of the structure of the Psalm. Even more, I discovered this week about not just Psalm 116, but the entire Egyptian Hallel actually form one very large chiasm.

## Ps113:1-118:29

- A** (113:1-3) The Name of the LORD. 113:1 praise the name of the LORD. (שְׁמִי הוּא)
- B** (113:4-9) Salvation of the weak. 113:7 The LORD raises the needy from the dust, lifts the poor from the ash heap
- C** (114:1-8) Escape from foreign country. 114:1 When Israel came forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from an alien people
- D** (115:1-11) Trust in the LORD. 115:9 The house of Israel trusts in the LORD (בטח)
- E** (115:12-16) To fear the LORD. 115:13 Will bless those who fear the LORD (יראיהוה)
- F** (115:17-18) Praise the LORD. 115:17 The dead do not praise the LORD, all those gone down into silence (יהלליה)
- G** (116:1-4) Prayer for salvation. 116:4 Then I called on the name of the LORD, "O LORD, save my life!
- H** (116:5-8) Rewards of the LORD. 116:7 Return, my soul, to your rest; the LORD has been good to you (שובי)
- I** (116:9-11) **Resurrection. 116:9 I shall walk before the LORD in the land of the living**
- H'** (116:12-15) Rewards of LORD. 116:12 How can I repay the LORD for all the good done for me? (אשיב)
- G'** (116:16-19) Prayer for salvation. 116:16 LORD, I am your servant, your servant, the child of your maidservant; you have loosed my bonds
- F'** (117:1-2) Praise the LORD. 117:1 Praise the LORD, all you nations! Give glory, all you peoples! (הלליה)
- E'** (118:1-4) To fear the LORD. 118:4 Let those who fear the LORD say (יראיהוה)
- D'** (118:5-9) Trust in the LORD. 118:8 Better to take refuge in the LORD than to put one's trust in mortals (מבטח)
- C'** (118:10-14) Escape from foreign country. 118:10 All the nations surrounded me; in the LORD'S name I crushed them
- B'** (118:15-24) Salvation of the weak. 118:22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone
- A'** (118:25-29) The Name of the LORD. 118:26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD (בשְׁמִי הוּא)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Literary Structure (Chiasm, Chiasmus) of Psalms,  
[http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/19\\_Psalms\\_pericope\\_e.html](http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/19_Psalms_pericope_e.html)

Even though it is six songs rather than one, its center is in exactly the same place. In other words, we are now in the very heart of the entire reason why we praise Yahweh according to these Passover-Lord's Supper songs.

What is that? **Jesus begins to embody the suffering and death** that is Psalm 116. In fact, **Acts 2:24** actually applies the "**pangs of death**" from **116:3** directly to Jesus' death! But it does so by combining it with the heart of the song. "**God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.**"

What then is the heart of the song? It contrasts death with life. First the death:

- **For you have delivered my soul from death (8)**
- **My eyes from tears**
- **My feet from stumbling**

You should think about all three of these things first and foremost when you think about Christ that night and into the next morning. He **cried** as it were tears of blood. He did not **stumble** even though he prayed, "**Father, take this cup**

from me!” But most of all, he died. The contrast is thus with life:

- I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living (9)
- I believed, even when I spoke: “I am greatly afflicted” (10)
- I said in my alarm, “All mankind are liars” (11)

For the original Psalmist, walking in the land of the living was a kind of spiritual or metaphorical resurrection. But not for Jesus. He knows that he will literally live again in a resurrected body in just three days. He told his disciples this on many occasions.

And yet, what does he have to go through? “I believed, even when I spoke: ‘I am greatly afflicted’; I said in my alarm, ‘All mankind are liars’” (Ps 116:10-11). This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul in Romans, “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom 3:4). Does this arrest you in your tracks, forcing you to stop all pretension about your own goodness or the goodness of those around you? If a psalmist, who was undergoing some kind of torment that was possibly leading him to death could see this, how much more the spotless Lamb of God who was now being betrayed

by his friend, **led away** by the military that was supposed to protect him, **abandoned** by his closest companions, **lied about** by false-witnesses he ministered to, **spat upon** by his guards, **delivered over to death** by his very own religious leaders—his pastors if you will, **mocked**, **slandered**, and **ridiculed** by his own people, and crucified by every single person? Truer words have never been spoken.

But now let's think about Paul's quotation, "**I believed, even when I spoke...**" He does not quote it as if it were Jesus' belief, but *his own* and those of his companions. It is **a confession of faith**, of trust in the resurrection of Christ! His larger context is, "**... according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence**" (**2Co 4:13**). Paul, like Peter in Acts, is not just tacking on the resurrection to Psalm 113. It is predicted right here in the middle of the Hallel! Paul is giving the context of the Psalm in his confession! And this becomes the remedy to what ails him.

Paul sees something Augustine said the OT saints saw because of this Psalm:

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, came in the flesh, suffered, arose, ascended into heaven; we now believe that all of this has been fulfilled, as you hear words of past time. With us in the company of this faith are also those ancestors who believed that he would be born of a virgin, would suffer, would arise, would ascend into heaven. For the apostle pointed to them when he said, “But having the same spirit of faith, as has been written, ‘I have believed and because of this I have spoken,’ we also believe, and because of this we also speak.” The prophet said, “I have believed, and because of this I have spoken.” The apostle says, “We also believe, and because of this we also speak.” But, that you may know that the faith is one, hear him saying, “Having the same spirit of faith, we also believe.”

(Augustine, TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 45.9.2)

This faith of Paul’s is [not an easy-believism](#), a walk-the-aisle and you’re good to go kind of thing that is all too familiar in our day. That is why it is so important to remember his talk about his own affliction. However, I want you to see that Paul is not just talking about his afflictions as a kind of side note, or a way to garner

sympathy. Rather, he sees himself as a kind of new speaker of this Psalm—in Christ. For, in fact, the Psalm itself is completely wrapped up in this kind of suffering. For Jesus, it was of a kind we cannot possibly imagine. But when you are in Christ, you enter by faith into a kind of suffering that is like his, for his Name’s sake, and you do so willingly. And not only this, you do so triumphantly, worshipfully, happily.

Because of what Jesus did in being raised from the dead after dying for the sins of the world, the Christian can now enter into any kind of suffering without utterly despairing. But in all this, I don’t want you to forget Psalm 115. Trust in the LORD, for he is your shield. 115 is the rightful complement to 116, the morning to its evening, sung on the same feast day. Why? Because it foreshadows the object of your faith and the hope you are to have and the happiness that drowns out your sorrows.

Friend, have you listened to long to the selfish ways the world tells you to “get over it?” Do you still not see how vital this message it? Do not worship the idols which bring you down so that you become like them. Remember the promises of God to his saints. Remember the death of the

Lord Jesus. And remember that even in your death, it is precious in his sight, because through it, he will raise you from the dead and bring you to newness of sinless life forevermore.

There are reasons why God led the editor to put these songs together, led the nation to sing these songs together, and perhaps had them even be morning and evening songs sung at other feast times on the same day? (see the earlier sermon on this).

Know and believe that you are able to conquer the suffering and life-threatening situations that you encounter, the things that so tax your mind and body and emotions and will. Because Jesus went before you and has given his Spirit to you to overcome at the end. Believe this! As we come to the meal again today, let us think upon these many profound truths of Jesus' last night as he sang Psalm 116. And believe, as you do it, that the very blessings of Psalm 115 come to you **“in the context of a communal communion with God”**<sup>10</sup> which is mediated by the true presence of Christ, our Manna and food, our wine and our drink, our Water of Life.

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<sup>10</sup> John Mark Hicks, “The Egyptian Hallel and the Lord’s Supper (Psalm 113-118), wineskins.org, March 14, 2010, <http://johnmarkhicks.com/2010/03/14/the-egyptian-hallel-and-the-lords-supper-psalm-113-118/>.

## AFTERWARD

I did not have the time to explain something else that is quite interesting about Psalm 116 and Paul's discussion in 2 Corinthians. It involves the "Presence" with which I ended the sermon and which the Apostle puts immediately after his quotation of Psalm 116:10 (see vs. 11).

In 2 Corinthians 3-4, before getting to the citation of Psalm 116, the Apostle speaks about Moses have a veiled face. The refers back to Exodus 33-34. What precipitated the veil over Moses' face, was his need for God's "Presence" (or "face" as we saw last time) to go with them. He even wanted to "see" the Presence, but God would not answer that request exactly as Moses desired.

The thing is, the "Presence" appears right there in the heart of Psalm 116 as well, though it is often left untranslated. The ESV reads, "I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living." However, the CJB is more literal, "I will go on walking in the presence of ADONAI in the lands of the living." The point is, Paul's entire discussion in 2

Corinthians 2-4 appears to be rooted in three texts: The Lord's Supper (from which he gets the "new covenant"), Moses' time with God on Mt. Sinai in the cleft of the rock, and Psalm 116 which ties not one, not two, but all three passages together.

Psalm 116:9-11	2Co 3-4	Ex 33-34	Mt 26; Mk 14
	Moses, who would put a veil over his face (3:13; also 14, 15, 16; 4:2)	33 When Moses had finished speak with them, he put a veil over his face	
3 The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish	4:10 Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus		
9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. (I will go on walking in the presence of ADONAI in the lands of the living; CJB)	4:14 Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence (see vs. 6 "God in the face of Jesus Christ)	33:14-15 "My presence" shall go with you ... if your presence does not go with me..." 33:20 "You cannot see my face/presence" (23)	
10 I believed, even when I spoke:  "I am greatly afflicted."	4:13 Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed		
13 I will lift the cup of salvation	3:6 He has made us ministers of a new covenant.  * This is called a "ministry" (3:7, 8, 9; 4:1). In other words, he is not stopping his discussion of the new covenant.		26:27 He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant...'