

Personally Speaking

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Psalm 116
Preached on: Tuesday, May 18, 2021

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Tonight we come to Psalm 116 and I invite you to turn there. Psalm 116. Every Psalm is wonderful and this one is no exception and I'm going to read it to start our time together, and then we'll try to ask it as the Spirit helps us here this evening. Beginning in verse 1,

1 I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications. 2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live. 3 The cords of death encompassed me And the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow. 4 Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I beseech You, save my life!" 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate. 6 The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. 8 For You have rescued my soul from death, My eyes from tears, My feet from stumbling. 9 I shall walk before the LORD In the land of the living. 10 I believed when I said, "I am greatly afflicted." 11 I said in my alarm, "All men are liars." 12 What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me? 13 I shall lift up the cup of salvation And call upon the name of the LORD. 14 I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones. 16 O LORD, surely I am Your servant, I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid, You have loosed my bonds. 17 To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, And call upon the name of the LORD. [And then there is an echo of the chorus in verse 18,] 18 I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the LORD'S house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Now Psalm 116 is an intensely personal Psalm. In Psalm 115 that we looked at last week, there was kind of a national corporate dimension to it, it was a Psalm about Israel in some ways, in Psalm 116 we see an individual Psalm, and then next week, Lord willing, in Psalm 117 we're going to see an international Psalm as it speaks of all nations. And these Psalms, as we've been pointing out, are a part of the collection known as the Egyptian Hallel, Psalms 113 through 118, Hallel being a word for praise, and it is praising God for the way that he has compassion on the lowly. He shows help and gives help to those who

are in need and who call out to him in faith. And the Egyptian Hallel aspect of it is the fact that God delivered the nation of Israel when they were in bondage and in slavery in Egypt, and in their weakness and in their distress and in their suffering, God came and delivered them.

Now what we see in Psalm 116 is while there is a corporate dimension to that, that there is an individual appropriation of this delivering saving power of God that goes on by faith. Intensely personal, as I said. Intensely individual. And as you go through the Psalm, if you are into counting, some people like to count and I'm one of them, I guess, in this Psalm the psalmist uses first-person pronouns: I, my, me, some 35 times to average out nearly twice for each verse. There is a first person pronoun that is here and so we see that this is something that is uniquely individual in its assertions. It is the expression of an Israelite who not only enjoys the corporate aspect of God's salvation of the nation, but he has appropriated it personally, he's part of the true spiritual Israel as he lays out this Psalm before us. And one of the aspects of personal faith, and this Psalm is very instructive to us in what the nature of true saving faith looks like in even New Testament times, you could say, is the fact that you see the psalmist calling on the Lord personally and repeatedly.

So I just want to show you this theme of calling on the Lord here just before we get into the exposition. In verse 2, the psalmist says, "I shall call upon Him as long as I live." In verse 4 he says, "I called upon the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I beseech You, save my life!'" And so he looks to the future and he says, "I will call on the Lord as long as I live," and in the past he recites a time when he called on the Lord and the Lord answered him. In verse 13, again a future looking aspect to this faith, "I shall lift up the cup of salvation And call upon the name of the LORD." And then finally in verse 17, "To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, And call upon the name of the LORD." So what we see is that in this personal faith, in this personal appropriation of the saving actions, the saving person of God, is that there is this heart attitude, this heart trust, this heart submission that calls upon his name, that when affliction comes, when trials come, we're not looking to the world to deliver us, we're not looking to our own resources. There is an instinctive reflex of faith that looks vertical, that looks up and calls upon the name of the Lord because, why would you do that, it's because you understand something essential about his character. He is a God who shows compassion to the needy and so naturally when we come to times of need, if we understand that that's who our God is, we understand that that's what he is like, then we would call upon him and affliction has a way of distinguishing true Christians from false Christians. True Christians when affliction comes, in one way or another over the course of time perhaps, they find themselves calling out and clinging to the Lord by faith, whereas false Christians, those who are no Christians at all, in other words, when temptation, when affliction comes, they fall away. They don't turn to the Lord, they walk away because they feel like they're not getting the bargain that they wanted in what they conceived to be of salvation. So this idea of trusting in the Lord in the midst of your adversity, when adversity comes, has a way of exposing the true nature of your heart and it's a good opportunity for self-examination for us just in that little introductory observation about the text.

Now as you go along, you find that not only is the psalmist expressing this past and present and future commitment to calling upon the name of the Lord, he's also giving thanks and we'll touch on this briefly and come back to it. It's an important part of this as well. In verse 3, you find the psalmist expressing thanks. He says, "The cords of death encompassed me." And what I mean by this is the occasion for this Psalm is that somehow he had been delivered from death, and so this Psalm of gratitude overall is in response to a deliverance from a lethal threat that was in his life. So in verse 3 he says, "The cords of death encompassed me And the terrors of Sheol came upon me." In verse 8 he says, "You have rescued my soul from death, My eyes from tears, My feet from stumbling." And you also see the theme of death in verse 15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones."

Now I have to tell you that one of the aspects that I genuinely love about all of Scripture is its realism and the fact that it does not step away or hide from the issue of death and the issues of sickness and affliction and all of those things. It deals with those issues honestly, transparently, and the one who has faith in Christ is the one who has ultimately conquered the fear of death, who can look at death in the eyes, so to speak, and look into the eyes of death with confidence because he knows he's in union with the Lord Jesus Christ who has himself gone into death and come out on the other side, and if Christ has died and risen again, then those who belong to him, those who are in union with him will share in that resurrection in like manner. And so it utterly changes our perspective on life to realize that we need not fear death, indeed, Hebrews 2 says that the Lord came to deliver those who were subject through the fear of death to slavery all of their lives. So we see already as we start to look at these aspects of genuine faith, we see this calling upon the Lord in times of affliction, we see this Christian view of death that gives us the ability not to be afraid of it. And sure, some of us need to grow in that. Sure, when the doctor first gives you the bad report there might be shivers and trembling of body in reaction to that, but as we remind ourselves personally and corporately as we encourage one another, we realize that we have a Lord who has conquered death and if we are in Christ, then we are safe in him and that changes the whole way that we respond to death and the way that we respond to affliction.

So this Psalm, Psalm 116, sets before us a pattern, sets before us an illustration of an intimate walk with Christ that is filled with trust and thanksgiving. Now along with that we'll see, and this is all by way of introduction, along with that we see something else that's of vital importance and that all of you are manifesting here this evening by your presence with us, is that true faith, genuine faith recognizes its responsibility for the public assembly of the saints, true faith has a public expression and there is this assembling with other saints that the redeemed heart genuinely wants to participate in. And the idea is this, true for each individual Christian, the idea is this, "I am so filled with gratitude at what the Lord has done in my life that I have to find a way to express it before others." That doesn't mean that everybody has to be up on a platform speaking publicly, but even in the private interactions there is this sense that, "I want to be with the people of God who are of like precious faith." And you see this, I mentioned the chorus there in verse 14, "I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people." And in verse 18, he repeats it, the exact same language, "Oh may it be in the

presence of all His people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!" "I am so grateful to God for what He has done in my life that I want to be with others who share my faith and I want to join in the celebration and in the proclamation of the Lord's goodness to me."

Now between that idea of calling on the Lord in affliction and a conquering sense of overcoming death, personal thanksgiving, this sense of being with the people of God, we start to see the marks of true faith that would be verified if we took the time to look at New Testament passages as well. A person who manifests a prayerless spirit over a course of time, that's the pattern of their life, not just an exception in an otherwise healthy spiritual walk but a pattern of prayerless, that's a person that has reasons to question their assurance of salvation. A person who has no sense of gratitude toward God and calling on God in the midst of affliction, that's a person who has reasons to doubt their salvation. And I'll say it plainly even though it's painful for some people to hear this because, you know, we have friends and family that are like this, someone who is content not to be with the people of God, someone who is content just to have their own little circle and don't want to be with a public assembly of the people of God over the course of time and just, you know, "I'm going to worship in my own house and I'll worship by myself or with a small circle of family," that is a very serious spiritual problem because the inherent to true saving faith is this dynamic that makes you want to be with others of like precious faith. The Scriptures in the New Testament are filled with commands about ministry to one another and we've looked at that in the past. Well, how can you do "one anothers" by yourself? How can it be that someone could be content to read Scripture and to understand what it says about not forsaking the assembly with the saints, of loving one another, of serving one another, of praying for one another, how can you fulfill any of that if there's not another in your life to do it with, I ask you? So these are serious matters.

Now here in Psalm 116, we see them from the positive side, from the positive expression of them, and that's going to be our focus here this evening, and so we're just going to break this Psalm sort of in half and look at it in two sections. The first section we'll see his thanks for answered prayer, and then secondly we'll see his outspoken gratitude. There is answered prayer that he recites, he's reciting this first section an occasion of answered prayer, and then in the second half there is the expression of gratitude that he has for the Lord's kindness and graciousness to him. So we'll go through this rather quickly as it's a longer Psalm and we can only hit highlights in a time like this.

So first section: a matter of answered prayer. The psalmist opens here with an affectionate affirmation of his faith. An affectionate affirmation of his faith. He's affirming his faith and he does it in terms of deep heart affection. Verse 1,

1 I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications.

He's saying, "I love the Lord." It's not simply a matter of external ritual to him, there is a heart love for the Lord in his life and this love for God, this affection, these desires to honor and glorify him and appreciate and show gratitude to him, this is a mark that the New Testament says is a mark of true saving faith without question about it. The Apostle

Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:22 says this, he says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed." And so there are those that love the Lord and there are those that are under a curse, there's no third category to be found. And why is it that the psalmist loves the Lord? Well, he gives his reason immediately there in verse 2. He says, "I love the Lord because." He is explaining why it is that he wants to give thanks to the Lord and it's,

2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.

Verse 1, "I love the LORD because He hears me. He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me." So he's thanking God, he's expressing love to God because he understands that God is a gracious compassionate God who hears the prayers of his children, and so there is this humble thanks that is unashamed to acknowledge that, "I have a humble dependence upon God and when I come to Him, He hears me and He answers me, and I trust Him for that." There is this deep-rooted trust being expressed in this love for the Lord.

Now the challenge for many of us, for many of you and for me too, is the fact that when affliction hits us, we're not always that confident in this aspect of the Lord's character. We question God. We doubt God. We are filled with anxiety and we wonder if he loves us or not. Well, Scripture could not be more plain that the nature of God should evoke in us a completely different heart response than that, and that when we go to the Lord, it's with a sense of confidence that he loves us, that he cares for us and he will provide for us.

There is an important passage in the Sermon on the Mount on this topic in Matthew 7, I would invite you to turn there with me, and you get a sense that it's not simply that the Lord hears our prayers and he is aware of it and then maybe he'll do something, maybe he won't. No, the teaching of Scripture is that God, when we belong to Christ, God is our heavenly Father and that means that we can trust him and our Father will do good to us because that's what a father does. Jesus had taught us to pray in Matthew 6:9, "Pray this way, Our Father who is in heaven," and then going on in Matthew 7, he gives us a sense of what our attitude can be and what the Father's response is when we pray.

Verse 7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." These verbs are in a verbal tense in the original language that suggests an ongoing prayer, continual prayer. Not simply a one-off deal, "God, help me," and then if nothing happens, you know, well, then this passage was not fulfilled. No, it's an idea of a heart attitude, a sustained kind of prayer that he's speaking of and he says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks [like that] receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Then he goes on and shows why that must be the case. He appeals to the nature of man and goes from a lesser to a greater argument. He says in verse 9, "what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" His argument is when a dependent son goes to his father and asks him to supply a need, the father will do that and not give him something evil in response to a legitimate request. So he asks for bread, the father

gives him bread, not a rock. That would be cruel and sadistic. He asks for fish, the father won't give him a snake. We understand this from a human perspective, that this is the way good parents interact with their children.

Now Jesus clenches his argument and gives us a sense of why we can have confidence when we pray to God. He says in verse 11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children." He says your heart is sinful and broken and defiled by sin and you know to do this, well, "how much more [then] will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" If you, a sinful creature, know to do this, how much more in a lofty good and loving way will the heavenly Father do that to those that belong to him? Of course God will be good to us when we pray to him. Of course he'll give good answers to our prayers when we pray to him. How could it be any other way? How could it be any other way?

So going back to Psalm 116, the psalmist speaking some, you know, centuries before Christ came and spoke those words in Matthew, the psalmist had already tasted that in Old Testament terms. He says, "When I pray, the Lord hears me. It's not just that He hears me, He answers and He answers me with good things, and because I know that to be true about Him," verse 2, "I am going to call upon Him as long as I live." God had delivered him in a crisis and what he is saying now is that the resolution of my heart is this, is that I am going to spend my life, the days that I have remaining, I am going to give myself over to trusting prayer because I know that God is like this, it makes me love him, and as a result of that, he's going to find me being one that calls upon him as long as I live. So he gives himself unconditionally to this resolution of what he will do in the future.

Now what can we say about this? Well, true faith, true, genuine, biblical, God-given faith to the heart has an element in it of glad unconditional surrender to Christ, to the God of the Bible. There is this sense where we give everything over to him, we give ourselves over to him and we do away with the conditions, we do away with the reservations and we just come and we give ourselves completely to him in that act of faith when we appropriate Christ. Some people have compared it to just signing your name to a blank check and handing it over, "Here's my life, Lord. You fill it in however You wish. I give myself to You that completely. I submit to You that completely. I trust You that completely. No reservations, nothing that I'm hiding, no sin that I'm unwilling to forsake. All of this, I give myself over to You." And in this sense he says, "I will call upon Him as long as I live," there is this future resolution that says there's no turning back now. There's no turning back now.

Now I just ask you in a friendly way here this evening because there are, you know, there are some of you here that I don't really know and so it's fitting for me as a pastor to ask this question, you know, as you, you know, in the faith that you proclaim to have in Christ, do you see elements of these things there, this surrender to Christ? Is there this trusting love in the goodness of the Father, the goodness of Christ? Do you know God in that way? Is your faith like that? Is he a God that you call upon or are you just self-reliant and resistant? Is it a faith that desires to be with the people of God and to share in a

giving of self in conversations and a love that is centered around the goodness of Christ in your life? Is your faith like that because that's the real thing, that's the real kind. There's all kinds of spurious kinds of faith, all kinds of people that say one thing with their mouth and live another way, that deny with their life what they say with their lips. I'm asking you whether there is some kind of consistency between what you confess with your mouth and what you live with your life. That's what we see here in Psalm 116. It is intensely personal that way.

Now what was the crisis? We've already pointed this out. In verse 3 he said that, "The Lord has inclined His ear to me," in verse 3 he gives us an idea of what it was. Without a lot of detail he says,

3 The cords of death encompassed me And the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow.

It reads as though he had nearly died, that he had nearly lost his life on some occasion. Death, the picture is this if you think of a western movie, it's like death, if you personified death, it's like death had lassoed him and was pulling him in and there was nothing that he could do about it. Death was exercising and pulling him with its cords, pulling him toward the grave. He was trapped in a life-threatening situation, whatever it was, he doesn't give us the details. So in that situation where it was very desperate, he called out to the Lord, "Lord, save me!" Again, it reminds me of Jonah 2 as Jonah is sinking down into the sea. He called upon the Lord. He looked toward the temple and said, "Lord, save me!" And at that moment, at the precise moment of utter desperation and all hope being lost, at that moment the Lord had saved him.

Some people say, you know, the Lord is never late and seldom early. You know something about that, right? You're under a trial for a long time, it's getting worse and worse, and at just the right time the Lord intervenes and saves you, maybe in a moment, maybe in a season of life where some kind of rescue and deliverance comes, but when we are in the Lord's hands, we are able to trust him for his timing and to call upon him and know that he will act on our behalf, he will do good to us. He will do good to us. He will do good to us. I repeat it because I think we need to hear it again and again. He will do good to us. There will be no question at the end when it's all said and done and when your life is over and when you enter into heaven, there will be no question whatsoever in your mind that the Lord has done all things well and he has been exceedingly good to me. There's no question about that, right? It could not be any other way with a perfectly good God, a loving gracious God who delivers his people. It couldn't be anything other than far better, far abundantly more than what we could ask or think. It couldn't come out any other way. I need to hear this myself. I need to hear this tonight. I'm preaching to myself tonight.

So God had intervened and saved him and answered a prayer. You see his prayer there in verse 4. I got a little bit ahead of myself but that's all right. The cords of death had encompassed him, and in verse 4,

4 Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I beseech You, save my life!"

And obviously from the fact that he's writing this Psalm, the Lord did just that and what happens and what the psalmist draws from that is this, is that God's mercy to him in that time of great extremity was a display of the utter perfections of God, of the excellency of his attributes.

Look at verse 5,

5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate.

Look at those beautiful terms describing the very nature of the character of God. He is gracious. He is righteous. He is compassionate. In his grace, he sends undeserved favor to his needy children. In his righteousness, he acts in a just way. He keeps his promises. He upholds his standards. He keeps his word that, "I am with you always even unto the end of the age." He keeps that promise and manifests the fact that he is indeed with us. His righteousness shows that he acts completely consistently with his revealed word. It could be no other way. It's impossible for God to lie. How could it be any other way? And in his compassion, he gives merciful help out of abundant love. He gives undeserved favor. He acts with justice and he gives merciful help out of his abundant love. That's who God is.

Now listen, if you are a true Christian and you have some kind of consciousness and understanding from Scripture that you have been delivered from sin, Satan and hell, and that you now belong to Christ, that your salvation is secure, that God has pardoned all of your sins and covered you with the righteousness of Christ so you can stand before him in perfect confidence, that he accepts you for the sake of his Son, if you know something about that, then you understand that the Lord is gracious, righteous and compassionate and these things belong to you. God has shown those attributes to you personally when he saved you in Christ. This is what God has done for you. You, undeserving, needy, you being unrighteous, God has showered all of that kind of manifestation of his character onto your life and upon your soul. Now I ask you, then, how could you not be anything other than what the psalmist says? A cornerstone expression of your faith and life attitude is found in verse 1, "I love the Lord because He hears me. I cried out to Him as a sinner, Lord, be merciful to me the sinner and He did. He was, He was kind. He saved me by grace alone, through faith alone. It was nothing I did. It was a gift from God that He gave to me when I didn't deserve it. At the time when I most recognize how vile and what a rebel I was, at that moment that's when God showed His mercy to me. I understand what Romans 4 says, God justifies the ungodly. He saves those who don't deserve it. It's not because I worked my way up into His favor. He showed me favor when I utterly did not deserve it. And so that's why I love Him." Do you get it?

The heart response to the mercy of God is to love him like this and what Psalm 116 shows us is that these attributes of God are not abstract academic qualities that are just a matter of theological speculation. To the believing heart, these are vibrant living realities

that define the reason that we exist. "I live for this," the true believer says. "This is the bread that I eat. This is the water that I drink. This is what sustains me is knowing that God is like that." And because God is like that, what we grow in as we study all of the Psalms together, what we start to understand as we study the New Testament and the person of Christ together is this, because God is righteous, because he is gracious, because he is compassionate, his nature – watch this – his nature with those attributes, his nature determines the manner in which he will help his people in their times of need. When we come to him and we cast our hearts before him, we lay our hearts before him in our time of need, we can have utter confidence because God is unchanging, he is immutable, to use the theological term. God has always been like this, he is like this now, he always will be, therefore when I call upon him and he responds, it will be a manifestation of his righteousness, his grace, and his compassion. It could be no other way.

So this is the reality of the life of true faith and the psalmist in verse 6 acknowledges that he is not worthy of that. He speaks about it humbly. In verse 6 he says,

6 The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.

He said, "Here I was a sinful nobody, here I was in complete helplessness and in desperation calling upon Him, and the Lord preserved me, the Lord helped me in that time of desperation." This is not a Psalm of one boasting of his own goodness, this is one acknowledging his unworthiness, his low and humble estate and saying the Lord saved even me like that.

Now as you go on in verses 7 and 8, the psalmist embraces his moral obligation to respond in faith to the Lord going forward. The fact that God is like this, the fact that God has delivered us, that creates a moral duty upon us to continue to respond to him in faith and we embrace that obligation. We embrace that because we love the Lord who hears us. So in verses 7 and 8, look at it there. He says,

7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

After speaking to himself, he addresses the Lord in verse 8.

8 For You have rescued my soul from death, My eyes from tears, My feet from stumbling.

Don't you love that triplicate expression of the Lord's goodness to him? My soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. It gives you echoes of the Lord's prayer, "Deliver us from evil. Deliver us from the evil one." So God had relieved his suffering and so now the psalmist, as it were, he's looking in the mirror and he tells himself, he instructs himself, he says, "O soul, here's what you do now, now you forsake anxiety and you trust this Lord instead. Because God is like this, because He has done this for me, therefore I have to turn away from my tendency toward anxiety and come

back to the rest that I have found in the Lord who is like this. He is righteous. He is gracious. He is compassionate." And one of the ways, my friends, my Christian brother and sister, one of the ways that you are going to most grow in the faith is when you take yourself in hand and you look in the mirror and you speak truth to yourself. You speak truth to yourself and you address your heart. With your mind full of truth, you address your heart which is in turmoil and struggling and all of that, you instruct your heart from your mind and say, "These things are true therefore, my soul, you rest in what I know to be true."

This is how we grow in the midst of our trials and do you know what? It takes some effort. It's a whole lot easier to just, and I'm speaking from personal experience here, it's a whole lot easier to just give in to your fears, your anxieties, it's easier to give in to those and just start to analyze it and it kind of all collapses on itself. Well, as a Christian, we don't have to live that way and we shouldn't live that way because we have 66 great books of truth to address our heart with. We speak to our hearts from the promises of God and say, "Look, these are the promises of God. He will keep His promises. Trust Him, my soul." We're talking to ourselves now. You go further, you go further, you tell yourself, "Is it not true that Christ the Lord went to the cross for your salvation? Is it not true that Christ the Lord shed His blood for your soul? Is that not an expression of His eternal love? Is it not an expression of an eternal purpose to do good to you, my soul?" How could it be that if Christ did the greater thing of shedding his blood for the forgiveness of your sins, for the pardon of your soul, how could it be that he will not do everything else that is necessary for our well-being?

That's the argument of Romans 8. We should turn back there for just a moment. Romans 8. And I hope down the road after the 10 Commandments series is completed, I hope to take us next through the book of Romans. That's on my agenda here. But in Romans 8 after speaking forth all of the greatness of the doctrine of justification by faith and the way that the Lord sanctifies us once we've been saved, he says in verse 29, well, let's go to verse 28. It's familiar, "we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." Now what's the conclusion of that? What does it mean for our life and our perspective as we look forward to the remainder of our earthly life here? Verse 31 and we see how the cross is central to his argument. Verse 31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" If he has done the greater thing of giving us Christ, will he not certainly do the lesser things that are necessary for our spiritual and physical well-being during the course of our life on earth? Sure, there will be times when it seems like the provision is meager but his grace is sufficient for us, it says in 2 Corinthians 12:9. He gives us enough. It may not be all that we wanted originally but it's enough. And he does it gladly and he does it in a way that teaches us to love him and to trust him more and more as we go along.

So if we know the character of God, if we remember the cross of Christ, if we remember the gift of heaven that awaits us, then we're going to grow in faith as we exert the faith and the effort that it takes to speak that kind of truth to our hearts when we're not feeling like it. Sometimes faith is a struggle, sometimes it's a battle. These are the weapons of our warfare. These are the weapons of developing trust and growing in grace.

So what the psalmist is saying as you go back to Psalm 116, God saved his life, God comforted his soul, God cleared his path, and as a result of that his heart is full of praise. Now in verse 9, his gratitude for all of that leads to a vow of future obedience. Verse 9, he says in light of all of this, so to speak he says that, verse 9,

9 I shall walk before the LORD In the land of the living.

And he looks back on the context of his prayer, he takes a final glance back at what the episode of his crisis had been and says, verse 10,

10 I believed when I said, "I am greatly afflicted."

I believed, I trusted God when I realized I was greatly afflicted.

11 I said in my alarm, "All men are liars."

In the midst of his great affliction, he believed. In other words, he put his trust in the Lord. He consciously put his confidence about the nature of the future, he confidently put his confidence about the nature of the future in the Lord during his time of need. It doesn't take any faith to be confident when everything's going well. There is no virtue in that, so to speak. As Job teaches us, true faith is exercised, true faith is displayed when it is tested.

So this Psalm lays a challenge before us all here tonight, doesn't it? Are you here and you're being tested by affliction of one kind or another? Well, the test is this: how will you respond? Will you put your trust in the Lord? Maybe it's not personal, maybe you're watching others going through trials, people you love who are straying from the Lord. We all know about that. We all know the heartache that that brings. Well, even in that, this is our opportunity to say, "Lord, I'm going to trust You even in the midst of this. I realize I may not see any resolution to this in my earthly life but, Lord, even if I don't, I'm still going to trust You. You can slay me, Lord, and I'm still going to trust You," the words of Job.

So what the psalmist is showing us is this, the affliction had purified his faith and taught him not to trust in man. All men are liars, in verse 11. Sure, they are. You just come to a point eventually in life where you realize that there is no refuge in man whatsoever. Man does not have the ability to truly help us in the things that really matter. Man does not have the ability to redeem our souls. Man does not have the ability to change our afflictions when our loved ones are, you know, going in a different direction. Men can't help us with that. There is no refuge in them in that, and a lot of times when suffering

comes, you find the people you thought were your friends are walking away from you, right? You've all experienced that. Well, we can be bitter about that, I suppose, it's not a good idea, or we can just let us say, "Okay, I see the reality here. Really and truly my only refuge is in the God of my salvation. My only refuge is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And friends may fail me, foes assail me, but He, my comfort, helps my soul."

So the entire situation had alarmed the psalmist, it had vexed him, and in his discouragement, his danger, he called on Yahweh and Yahweh had delivered him. So now with gratitude, he's devoting himself to walk with God and that brings us to our second portion here this evening, what I've titled outspoken gratitude. Answered prayer in the first 11 verses, outspoken gratitude in the final eight verses. We'll go through these more quickly than we did the first half of the Psalm.

The psalmist now pivots and having stated earlier that he was going to call upon the Lord as long as he lives, now he defines what that means and what it looks like. In verse 12 he asks a rhetorical question. He says,

12 What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?

"God has been so good to me, what shall I do in response? What will my life look like henceforth going forward?" The answer is there is no way to repay this. Christian, in New Testament times, how could you possibly repay the Lord? Think about it. How could you possibly repay the Lord for what he has done for you? How could you possibly give him an equivalent payment that is commensurate with the unspeakable grace that he showed in delivering you from sin, death and hell? You who were hell-bound now are heaven-bound. You who were under judgment are now under grace. You who were full of sin have now had your hearts cleansed and sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ. How can you possibly give a commensurate payment for that? You can't. There is nothing that we can do. "If the whole realm of nature were mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all," as the hymnwriter said.

So in verse 13 he says this. "Here's what I'll do,

13 I shall lift up the cup of salvation And call upon the name of the LORD.

"I'll speak of grace and I'll call on the Lord, this One who saved me. I'll make this the focus of my life. I'll make this what I do. I'll make this what I'm about. I'll give my whole heart over to this." Now this response of gratitude seems to be in the context of Psalm 116 as we've been going through it this evening, it's obvious in the momentum of the word of God here this evening that it could be no other way, and the word brings us that way and it seems obvious, but actually, do you know what? A life of thanksgiving is actually a pretty rare response to the grace and goodness of God.

Look over at Luke 17. I want you to see this occasion in the life of our Lord. We'll take the time to read it in verse 11. Luke 17:11, "While [Jesus] was on the way to Jerusalem,

He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices," the number 10 is important there, by the way, "they raised their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When He saw them, He said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan." One of the 10 came back and Jesus answered and said, "'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.'" One out of the 10 came back to give thanks and the question is whether you and I are one of the one or one of the nine. Which one are we?

It's convicting to ask ourselves the question: is there some kind of balance of thanksgiving and gratitude in my prayer life to go along with the many requests that I make? Oh, the Lord is gracious to hear our request, he's gracious to hear and answer but a thankful heart, a rejoicing heart in 1 Thessalonians 5, this is the will of God for you. This thankful heart is the will of God for you. 1 Thessalonians 5, I want to read it right. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Everybody wants to know what's the will of God for my life? Be thankful for your salvation. Be thankful to the Lord for his grace, his goodness, his greatness. There's the will of God for you, then you can sort everything else out in that context. It's not that complicated. It's no good to talk about the will of God in details if we don't pray eminently a thankful person. This is revealed in Scripture. The way that providence unfolds life is secondary in comparison.

So the psalmist here, going back to Psalm 116, is expressing his grateful heart. Verse 14,

14 I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all
His people.

"God, give me an opportunity to express my thanksgiving to You in a public forum where others can hear, be edified and be encouraged to do the same thing. Lord, I want to be out front in giving thanks to You." A good way to live your life, huh? A good thing to give your life to, right? What better goal in life could there be than that?

Now for a moment the flow of thought may seem to change in the next verse, verse 15,

15 Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones.

"Because I've been delivered from death," and now he says, "Precious is the death." You know, what are we saying here? I think it can be understood in this way. The psalmist is simply saying that God cares for his people all the way down to the moment of their death. As they exhale their last breath on earth and inhale their first breath in the air of heaven, God is caring for them all the way. Their time of death is important to him. Their time of death is even appointed by him, and as one commentator said, it is no light thing

in the sight of God that his servants should perish. God takes particular care for his servants even on their deathbed; even as life is ebbing from them, the Lord is especially near and close at that point. I know that to be true even if I haven't personally experienced it yet. It could be no other way. If God created us to enter into glory, if God loves us and appointed the length of our days, if he's gracious and righteous and compassionate, then doesn't it follow, can it be any other way that in our moment of most extreme weakness the Lord is going to find us precious and especially near to care for us in that hour? And so the deliverance that the psalmist is celebrating from a near-death experience proves that the psalmist belongs to this Lord of whom he speaks.

Verse 16, look at it there. He's giving thanks here, expressing gratitude.

16 O LORD, surely I am Your servant,

I am your servant because I see it from the way you delivered me in my time of desperation. He repeats it for emphasis,

I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid, You have loosed my bonds.

So what's he going to do? He's going to be outspoken in his gratitude about it.

17 To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, And call upon the name of the LORD. 18 I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people,

And he climaxes the Psalm on this theme of worship. Verse 19,

19 In the courts of the LORD'S house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

Now whether this at the time he wrote this he was referring to the tabernacle or the temple is not so important as this, he is saying, "I will give thanks in the presence of God and His people." Personal faith, genuine faith finds expression in public gatherings of worship. That is why genuine believers are more than happy to overcome their initial jitters and stand in the waters of baptism and give testimony to faith in Christ. That's why they are glad to do it. Without exception, those who are truly redeemed welcome the opportunity to be able to give public expression of the faith by which they've been saved.

God has delivered us from more than earthly problems. I never get tired of saying this so you can just get used to the repetition, I guess. Christ has saved us from sin and Satan and death and hell and eternal destruction. Beloved, if he has saved you like that, if God has spared you from death, there is a spiritual purpose that flows from that. Salvation has given you spiritual purpose in life now going forward, it's so that you might be a person that gives outspoken gratitude to the Lord in the presence of his people and in so doing and living a life of which we have spoken here this evening, that you might prove to be useful to God by doing this kind of spiritual work in his name.

Let's pray together.

Father, corporately we look back on Your goodness to us, so many different ways, we look at Your perfections of grace and righteousness and compassion and, Lord, what can we say publicly here tonight except the very words that the psalmist expressed, "I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications." Father, may You be that kind of God to each one of us here this evening, may we be this kind of person of faith in response and, Father, for those that are suffering with watching loved ones stray, Father, we just pray a special mercy upon them, upon each situation. We know that there are many in that situation here this evening. We pray that You would be gracious to them and that You would vindicate the prayers and trust that Your people express to You in these times and show forth Your goodness. We look to You, we pray to You, we trust You, and we ask You to fulfill Your good purposes in a way that we could offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving as we continue to call upon Your great and blessed and holy name. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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