

THANKSGIVING 2023

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Scripture: Psalm 116

Psalm 116 (NLT)

- ¹ *I love the LORD because He hears my voice
and my prayer for mercy.*
- ² *Because He bends down to listen,
I will pray as long as I have breath!*
- ³ *Death wrapped its ropes around me;
the terrors of the grave overtook me.
I saw only trouble and sorrow.*
- ⁴ *Then I called on the name of the LORD:
“Please, LORD, save me!”*
- ⁵ *How kind the LORD is! How good He is!
So merciful, this God of ours!*
- ⁶ *The LORD protects those of childlike faith;
I was facing death, and He saved me.*
- ⁷ *Let my soul be at rest again,
for the LORD has been good to me.*
- ⁸ *He has saved me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.*
- ⁹ *And so I walk in the LORD’s presence
as I live here on earth!*
- ¹⁰ *I believed in you, so I said,
“I am deeply troubled, LORD.”*
- ¹¹ *In my anxiety I cried out to you,
“These people are all liars!”*
- ¹² *What can I offer the LORD
for all He has done for me?*
- ¹³ *I will lift up the cup of salvation
and praise the LORD’s name for saving me.*
- ¹⁴ *I will keep my promises to the LORD
in the presence of all His people.*
- ¹⁵ *The LORD cares deeply
when His loved ones die.*
- ¹⁶ *O LORD, I am Your servant;
yes, I am Your servant, born into Your household;
You have freed me from my chains.*
- ¹⁷ *I will offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.*
- ¹⁸ *I will fulfil my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all His people—*
- ¹⁹ *in the house of the LORD
in the heart of Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!”*

¹ I love the Lord

The psalmist starts with the words, “I love the Lord.” I’m not sure how you all resonate with that; what that means to you. How do you love the Lord? it’s one thing when we have something tangible in front of us to love. It’s easier when we can see, and then we can relate. But how do you love an intangible God, One who is not seen? I think each one of us finds our own way of expressing our love for us. Because as I’ve shared before with you many times, as DC Talk used to sing, “Love is a verb.” It’s an action thing. It’s a doing thing. So how do you love the Lord?

I remember in the early days of CAP, a lady came to me and said, “Pastor, I’m praying that one of these days, you and God will have a pillow fight.” I thought: All right. a) I can’t imagine throwing a pillow at God, but b) I can’t even imagine this scene of having a pillow fight. But I understood her sentiment that it was that we have such a relationship. You have pillow fights with people you love. Pillows are not what you use against enemies. They wouldn’t go very far. And that was what she was hoping for me. And I’ve continued to wrestle with it. how do we love God? And we each find out various ways to do it.

But the psalmist says: *¹I love the Lord because He hears my voice... ²He bends down to listen.* Can you imagine that? the God of the universe kind of hushes heaven and says: Hang on. My child, My son/daughter is calling. I’ve got to listen. He bends down and He listens to what we have to say.

This psalm very easily divides up into four kinds of components.

1. What was happening with the psalmist? What was his situation?
2. What did he do with the situation that he was in?
3. How did the Lord respond to him in this situation?
4. What was his response to the Lord’s response to his situation?

1. What was his situation?

*³Death wrapped its ropes around me;
the terrors of the grave overtook me.
I saw only trouble and sorrow.*

Death wrapped its ropes around me. I wonder whether any of you can relate to that, whether any of you can relate to death wrapping its ropes around you, that you’ve been at the very brink of life and death, not knowing if there is another breath that is coming. Maybe this was in a hospital room. You didn’t know whether you were going to come out, but you did. You know that feeling and you’ve never forgotten it.

And the psalmist says: It’s like the terrors of the grave. It’s like he was looking past this to the grave. This was how grave the situation was for him. And maybe you’ve been in that kind of a situation, one that is grave. He says he saw only trouble and sorrow. I wonder whether joy and peace and all those beautiful things that come as promises from the Lord are not there in your life; whether today you’re just overwhelmed.

⁶ I was brought low.

Just brought down, knocked down. And life has a way of doing that sometimes – to knock us down. We feel that we can’t get any lower. Whether it’s situations or people or whatever, we’ve been brought low.

¹⁰ I was deeply troubled and anxious.

It's possible that you've come to this Thanksgiving Sunday, and you've looked at all of these decorations and stuff and you said, "This is all great, wonderful to look at. But the situation that I'm going through is really difficult. It's so difficult for me to be in a festive mode or to be thankful because I'm troubled and I'm anxious. There are things that are bogging me, things that are unresolved, things that I'm worried about. And I've brought them with me to the church because that's the way they are. They are like ropes that encircle me. They haven't left me. And that was his situation. Maybe there are some of you here who can resonate with that.

2. What did he do with the situation he was in?

⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:

"Please, Lord, save me!"

¹⁰ "I believed in You,"

¹¹ I cried out to You.

Sometimes we look at verses like this and we think: that's the natural thing to do – to cry out to the Lord when we get into trouble. And yet, how often we fail to do it when trouble comes our way. Then we begin to deal with it the way we know how, in our own strength, in our own knowledge, in our own wisdom. We think it's our fight, it's our battle. and we forget that the first thing to do is to call out to Him. And yet, when we are completely spent, tired, ready to throw in the towel, then we call out to Him. But the psalmist, as he saw himself in this situation, he said, "I cried out to the Lord, and I said, 'Lord, please save me.'"

3. How did the Lord respond?

He says, He delivered me.

⁶ He protected me and he saved me.

⁷ The Lord has been good to me.

⁸ He has saved me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

¹⁶ He has freed me from my chains

That's what the Lord did – protected, saved, was good to him, saved him from death.

What about you, beloved? Where are you in crying out to the Lord? In your situation, your circumstance, has God reached out to you? Have you felt His protection? I know that as we look at our lives, especially on Thanksgiving Day, that we can say: Yeah, of course as I look back, there have been many times I have raised stones of ephraim, stones of remembrance that remind me how God has protected me, how He has saved me. And I know today that He is a good God, for He takes care of me, saved me from death, my eyes from tears.

Sometimes the tears just come; you can't hold them back. And maybe today, there are things that are pressing hard upon your heart and you think that you are cried out, that the reservoir of tears within you is dried up. And yet they come, and you can't hold them back because the situation is such. And the psalmist is saying: God is able to touch you in such a way, beloved, that the tears stop. And maybe those are tears that you've been shedding for your family members; maybe for friends, maybe for a situation, maybe for a reconciliation, whatever. I wonder this morning, whether God is saying: I'm still here. It's not your fight. The battle is mine. When are you going to throw the ball to me? Let me take it. When are you going to tag me?

Because He's the Protector, beloved. You and I, we are His children. He'll do anything for us, just as parents will do anything for their children. He loves us that much. He has freed my chains, broken those things crippled by fear, maybe anxious thoughts. He breaks them and He says: No more. I will keep in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on me. That's the peace I will give. And that's what He gives even today, this morning, wherever you are in your situation, the circumstances that are around you. God is with you, watching out for you. His eye is on you, waiting to protect, to save.

4. What is the psalmist's response to this?

⁷ *Calm my soul. Let my soul be at rest again, for the Lord has been good to me.*

⁹ *And so I walk in the Lord's presence as I live here on earth.*

Calm my soul, tell my soul that it is okay. I don't know how many of you are into cricket. I am. I have to look at the ads that come before and after every over. And about a month or two back, there was an ad that caught my attention. It was an ad that had Rohit Sharma, the Indian captain, and it had Amir Khan. Rohit Sharma was batting and Amir Khan was going to bowl. And you all know him, in his own inimitable way, he came in to bowl in a convoluted way; and before that he said to Rohit Sharma, "Middle stump." In other words, I've got your middle stump. Rohit Sharma said: Bowl. So he bowls and Rohit hits the ball, and hits it with such power that it flies past his face. And for a minute, he is just transfixed. Then he turns around and says, "All is well." Remember 'Three Idiots'? All is well! I thought about that – when we hand things to the Lord, we turn to our souls and we say: Be calm, my soul. It's okay. You don't have to beat like that anymore. Relax, let the tension go. God has taken over. Calm my soul.

That's what the psalmist says: Let my soul be at rest again, for the Lord has been good to me as I live here on earth. Then he says, ¹³ *I will lift up the cup of salvation.*

But before that, he asks a very pertinent question. Lord, within my situation, I've cried out to You; You've helped me. ¹² *What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?*

I love the KJV version on this line. It's very beautiful. "What shall I render unto Jehovah, for He has done so very much for me? What a good question to ask on Thanksgiving, because we know that whatever may be going on in my life, it doesn't change the fact that God has been good.

If I had been in a different setting, maybe in a church that was 'charismatic', I would have said to you: Turn to your neighbor and say 'God is good'. And they would have done it. But you all will look at me like: What? God is good, I know it, but I'm not going to tell my neighbor that. but isn't He good? We can talk ad nauseam about the things that He has done for us. He's been so good.

And the psalmist recognizes it, and out of that he says: What shall I render unto Jehovah for He has been so, so good to me.

¹³ *I will lift up the cup of salvation and praise the Lord's name for saving me. ¹⁴ I will keep my promises to the Lord. ¹⁷ I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. ¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.*

He says, "God has come through for me. He has inclined His ear in His compassion. He has drawn me to safety in spite of maybe an unthankful attitude. His grace has been so strong. He has been a gracious God. He has preserved me, kept me, and He has saved me." And in answer to this question: What shall I render unto Jehovah? he says, "I will do this, I will do this."

Three things, he says, and I want to present that to you:

- 1) I will offer a witness in the congregation about what God has done.
- 2) I will offer up a prayer of thanks or an offering of thanks to God.

3) I will keep my promises. I will keep my vows to You.

If we were to ask that question, beloved, in the light of all that God has done. I looked around you and saw unanimous assent that God has done remarkable things in your life, enough for us to be thankful today. Not because of the situations and circumstances that we are in, but because of who He is and how much He loves and cares for each one of us. He leans down to listen to us.

And so to the question: What shall I render unto Jehovah? Maybe we can take these three things.

- 1) I will offer a witness. Today I will tell somebody what the Lord has done in my life, how He has come through. I will find somebody and say: Look what the Lord has done. I need to tell you that He's done this remarkable thing in my life.
- 2) I will offer up a prayer of thanks to God. There's a song that says: Lord, today I don't need anything; I just want to thank You. No supplications today. Lord, I don't come asking for something. I don't come with my hands out. I come with my hands lifted up. I just want to thank You for what You've done.

And maybe today, invite the Holy Spirit to keep showing you those moments when God touched you, when God came through for you. And as He brings them to mind, say, "Lord, I'm so thankful for what You did." Recall how you felt about it. "Lord, I was so anxious at that time. I was so sad, I was broken. But Lord, You came through for me. I want to thank You for it today."

- 3) I will keep my promises. I think that the road that we have travelled as Christians, as ones who bear His name, is a road that is filled with many, many broken promises. When we are in need, we say, "Lord, if You get me out of this situation, this is what I will do." And we may do it for a season, and then we forget. We stop because now that has been resolved. I wonder whether today, we can look back at the promises that we have made to the Lord and say, "Lord, I broke that promise, but I'm going to make sure it's fulfilled in my life. I'm sorry, Lord, for it." Beloved, let's pick up those broken promises, those vows that we have made to Him when He came through for us and say, "Lord, I'm going to now come through on my promise.

Three things: Let's talk about Him to somebody and say, "Look what the Lord has done." Secondly, let's turn our attention up to Him and say, "Lord, for all these things that Your Spirit has brought to me, I give You thanks." And then thirdly, "Lord, for all those promises that I haven't come through on, I'm coming through with Your help. I'm going to make sure that I keep those promises.

Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest home.

Shall we pray?

Lord, what shall I render unto You? It sears our hearts Lord, for we realize that we have not done much, Lord, for all that You have done. And so Lord, today just these three things help us. You bring to us those people; You bring to us those instances when You have come through so that we can

raise a bouquet of thanks to You. And then, Lord, show us broken promises that we have made to You in the power and the authority of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus. Amen.
