

Do you love Him

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[0 : 00] turn back to our first reading in the book of Psalms, the book of Psalms in Psalm 116. We're going to look through this Psalm as a whole. We can read again at the beginning of the Psalm.

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore, I will call on his name as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me, the pangs of shoal laid hold on me. I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord. O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul.

As Christians, we are to be accountable for what we do as Christians. We are to hold each other accountable. We are to be a people who, if we meet together, it's not just asking the simple questions like, how are you today? Or what's fresh today? Or what have you been up to today? It's these general kinds of questions that we may ask of one another, and that's fine. But as Christians, and if we are Christians together in fellowship together, we should be able to ask one another more direct questions than that. And to approach one another in a way where in brotherly love and sisterly love, we can have concern for one another and longing to help one another. Ask questions like, how is your prayer life? And if we ask these questions, we would often maybe shrink back a bit. We may be afraid to ask that question in case it gets asked back of us. Because there are times in every Christian's life where prayer is a struggle, where we find it hard to draw near to God in prayer. But if we're not encouraging one another, and if we're not challenging one another, and doing it out of love, the devil will have a field day with us. Our prayer life will almost just diminish to nothing. The words won't come very easily. We're distracted easily. We try and sit down and pray, and suddenly something else comes to our mind, and we think, oh, I've got to deal with that now. Because that seems to be more important than our time with God. Or there are times when just we get out of the routine. The prayer and intimacy of prayer that we had enjoyed when we had maybe our morning prayers, if you're a morning person, or your evening devotions, or even times throughout the day when you made that space in that time where you could just draw near to God in prayer.

Don't look at me as if I've got it all sorted because I know I don't. Yet there are times in my life where I know my prayer life was so much better. Very often it was when I was working at sea that I felt my prayer life was so much better. And people seemed to think that that was strange. But we can get into a comfort zone when we're coming to church regularly. Maybe we're coming out to the prayer meeting.

We've got fellowship with people. We're hearing prayer a lot. We think things are good. We're in a comfort zone. But sometimes when we're taken out of that comfort zone, it's much better for us.

[3 : 53] When we feel that we are alone. When we have no one to have fellowship with. And very often that was my experience at sea. And yet there were times when I felt closer to God. When my prayer was more intimate towards God. But there are times when God teaches us the need of prayer.

Times when he reminds us that we are to be a people who are in close relationship with him. And we have to ask ourselves if we are struggling to pray to God. What can we do?

What can we do to get back to that intimate bond of prayer? When we felt so close to God. That he was there with us. As we were pouring out our hearts to him.

What can we do? Well that's where the book of Psalms so often comes into its own. The book of Psalms is not just a book that we use to sing praise to God.

It's wonderful to sing the Psalms of God to him. To offer up our praise to him in song. But the Psalms are much more than just a song book.

[5 : 13] They are a prayer book. So even as you are singing the Psalm you can enter into the prayer of the Psalmist. And read the words as you are singing them. How often do we just sing the

words of a Psalm and we are not even thinking about what are we actually saying?

What do we actually, what praise are we offering up to God? What do the words actually mean? And yet you can go through the Psalms and read them.

And pray them over and realise the need that the Psalmist had. Times when his own prayer life wasn't what it should be. Times when he was grumbling and complaining to God about things. And yet drawing near to God in an intimate way. So that as we come to the book of Psalms. As we approach God's word.

And as we feel our hearts are perhaps harder than they should be. We find that the word of God is able to melt our hearts. Psalm 116 gives us such an occasion.

[6 : 23] It gives us these words where the Psalmist is calling out to the Lord with a sense of thanksgiving. A sense of praise. I challenge you to go home and read this Psalm tonight or even throughout the week.

Read it. Meditate on it. And see if your heart is not moved by these words. By what he offers up to God in prayer.

And to pray these words yourself. Even if you just take the first four words of the Psalm. There's a sermon in these words.

There's enough there for us to just go home and ponder these words. I love the Lord. That's the first words the Psalmist offers up.

I love the Lord. Do you? Do you love the Lord? And if you do, why?

[7 : 31] For what reason do you love the Lord? And if you do, how do you love the Lord? The passage, these few verses we read in the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 22, Jesus gives a very direct question to the Pharisees.

He's been ministering now for, he's coming towards the end of his own days on earth. But he's been hearing all these grumbings.

He's been seeing people telling them parables like we were looking at this morning. The parable of the prodigal son. He's been seeing people grumbling and moaning and complaining.

And here he comes to this point where there's a direct question. What do you think about the Christ?

Whose son is he? And he leaves his audience stumped. They've got no answer. They've got no complaint.

[8 : 42] Not directly to him. They go away and they grumble about him. But it's only because he's challenging them. He's shaking their faith that they've had. He's challenging what they've believed up till now.

And they're not liking it. And as we read there at the end of this chapter, chapter 22, they dare not ask any more questions.

Here they had the Christ, the Messiah. The one we may often think we would love to just come and ask him questions. But they were afraid. They dare not ask any more questions in case he challenges them some more.

That's not the way we should be when we're challenged by these kinds of questions. What do you think of Christ? Do you love the Lord?

How is your prayer life? These are questions that shouldn't make us feel as if we should never be asked that.

[9 : 48] Don't dare ask me that question. They should be questions that challenge us but in a loving way. Because they are questions that come from the word of God.

So as we look through this psalm this evening, we're going to think about three questions that arise in this psalm. The first one is that question at the start. Do you love the Lord?

Do you love the Lord? And then we'll see in the next section from verse 5 to 11, we can ask the question, why would you love him? And then the last section, 12 to 19, we'll think of how.

How can you love him? Three questions that arise. And the first one, do you love the Lord? Now as you read the opening verse, there's a difficulty in the way it's worded.

And people could easily read this in the wrong way. And a false gospel could be easily taught from these words. As we read them here in the Bible in front of us, I love the Lord.

[10 : 57] That's a statement. And then it goes into a reason. Because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Now what's the difficulty with that?

Well the difficulty is that it would seem that the reason for his love is because he has heard and answered a prayer that he put up. But what does that mean if we pray and our prayer isn't answered?

Does that mean God doesn't love us? Or that we can't love him? Because he's not hearing our prayer, he's not answering our prayer.

But more than likely it's the way we want it to be answered. Now these words could easily be taken in that way. And it's not the way to look at them.

And people will preach in that way. If God isn't answering your prayer, the problem is with you. It's because of something that you've done.

[12 : 04] That God isn't hearing you. But that's not what these words are saying. And that's not what the psalmist is putting across. The way we could read these words, perhaps a better way of reading these words is, I love that the Lord listens to my prayer.

And I will continue to call on him, to pray to him as long as I live.

Now that's not saying that he doesn't love the Lord as well, he does. So that statement still stands, I love the Lord. But he loves the fact that the Lord listens to his prayer.

And notice, you can say, it's listens. Not that he answers exactly the way that he wants it to be answered. But God listens to his prayer. And he answers in his way.

And because he knows best. And the psalmist is showing it here. He knows what is good for me. I will continue to call on him as long as I live.

[13 : 21] You know, you see, as you go through the psalms, the psalms as a whole, the book of psalms. You find that the emotions of the psalmist, they're up and they're down. There are psalms where you feel that the psalmist is just in a place of rejoicing.

A place of delight. But there are also psalms where he's questioning. Where he's almost angry towards God.

But every psalm discusses the same thing. A relationship with God. And that is what our prayer life is all about.

It is about a relationship with God. And so you see, it's not just, I love the Lord when things are good. It's, I love the Lord when I'm at my lowest point.

Because he still hears my prayer. And you notice in verse 10, that highlights these thoughts as well. In verse 10 he says, I believed even when I said or I spoke, I am greatly afflicted.

[14 : 34] Even in the midst of his affliction, and we know from the psalm, the psalmist was close to the point of death. Whatever his situation is, we're not exactly sure what it was.

But as verse 3 shows, the snares of death encompassed me. He was close to the point of death.

But he says in verse 10, even when I was greatly afflicted, yet I still believed.

And that is where we see the faith of the psalmist shining through. Even in my affliction, I believed. I believed that the Lord is hearing my prayer.

That he is able to answer. And I love this. I love that the Lord hears my prayer. In the midst of my affliction.

So whatever situation you're going through, whatever circumstances you are in, you can call on the name of the Lord. And if you are struggling to do so, you can use the psalms to call on the name of the Lord.

[15 : 43] Take two of the psalms, two different psalms, to illustrate this point. One we sang together, Psalm 18. And there is David having been delivered from an enemy.

He says in Psalm 18, verse 1, I love you, O Lord. You are my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. My God, my rock in whom I take refuge.

My shield and the horn of my salvation. My stronghold. You see the ways showing his praise for who God is. Rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, horn, salvation, stronghold.

It's just pouring out praise. He's saying, I love that you have rescued me from my enemy. I love you, O Lord. But you can go to other psalms, Psalms of David, where the situation is very different.

In Psalm 142, there's David and he's in a cave by himself, surrounded by enemies. And what does he say there in verse 4, Psalm 142?

[16 : 55] Look to the right and see there is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. Very different situation.

Very different circumstances. But yet in verse 5, he says, I cry to you, O Lord. I say, you are my refuge. My portion in the land of the living.

Such a different situation, but yet still the same praise. You are my refuge. The covenant Lord who he is crying to, he's still able to say, I love that the Lord hears my prayer.

So you can go through the Psalms and you see all the emotions, all the situations. And you can enter into many of them, I'm sure. Because that's what's the beauty of the Psalms, they're so personal.

Perhaps we've all got our favorite Psalm because they relate to situations and experiences we've gone through ourselves. We can relate to them in that personal way.

[18:02] But what we continue to see is this. The faithfulness of God. The power of our almighty God. And we can say, I love that the Lord hears my voice.

Our love should not depend on our circumstances. God's love doesn't change.

His love is steadfast. We feel our love sometimes hot and cold. But the more we draw near to God in prayer, the more we have that relationship with him.

The love for him should make our hearts burn within us. Isaac Watts is a famous minister and a hymn writer. He suffered in his own health from a very young age.

He struggled. Physically, he struggled mentally. And he had to leave the work of the ministry, probably in his late 30s or thereabouts. But it wasn't the end of his ministry.

[19:13] And a lot of his hymns were written after he'd left the public ministry. Even when he struggled in his health, he still loved the Lord.

And he loved to praise the Lord. And five years after he left the ministry, he wrote the hymn, I Love the Lord, as really just a paraphrase of this psalm, Psalm 116.

So he's using these words in his own prayer, his own praise, to express his love for God. And he says in that hymn, I love the Lord.

He heard my cry and pitied every groan. Long as I live and troubles rise, I'll hasten to his throne. That's his paraphrase of the opening verses of Psalm 116.

I love the Lord. And even in the midst of my troubles, I'll hasten to his throne. I'll approach him in prayer.

[20:17] So the question that arises out of these verses, as we see in the psalmist here, is do you love the Lord? Do you love that the Lord listens to your prayer?

Do you love the fact that he is the one who is able to deliver, to deliver your soul? He is worthy of all praise.

Do you love the Lord? The second thing as we see as we go on in this psalm is, why would you love him? And the psalmist here in verse 5 to 11, he gives us a reason or various confirmations of who God is and why he is worthy of our love.

And you see it in two different ways we want to see here, really. First of all, he reminds us of who God is. And then we'll see that, then he reflects on who he is.

And again, it's good to do that in our prayers as well, to humble ourselves before God. And especially as we come to God in prayer, our first point is to praise God, to remind ourselves who we are praying to.

[21:40] Again, you look in the New Testament and you see Jesus teaching his disciples to pray. And, you know, again, we repeat the words of the Lord's Prayer.

We know them. Maybe off by heart. But how often do you just take time to reflect on the words of the Lord's Prayer and remind ourselves, this is a guide from the Lord Jesus as to how we are to pray.

And ask ourselves, is it how we pray? Is our first point of prayer, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

If we're honest with ourselves, how often do we start our prayer and remain in prayer for a few moments, a few minutes, even a long time just thinking and meditating on these words, who are you, Lord?

That's what we see in verse 5. Gracious is the Lord. Righteous is our God.

[22:44] Merciful is our God. You see, the first point of prayer there is who God is. And prayer, and especially if our prayer life is not what it should be, prayer can so often just descend into a list of wants.

And of course, as we see in the Lord's Prayer, there is a place for that. Give us this day our daily bread. There is a place for these lists of whether it's personal needs or the needs of others or things that are going on around us.

And there's nothing wrong with that in our prayer, but the harm is when it comes at the expense of not giving God his place. If that is our prayer life, a list of things that we want, then we easily end up in the wrong gospel of the first opening verses.

If we don't get what we pray for, we think, there's something wrong with me. But if we get it in the right order and pray first to the God who is gracious, who is righteous, who is merciful, and we see God for who he is, then as we're offering up our prayers, whether it's help for ourselves or others, whatever that need is, we're truly able to say, your will be done because you know best.

And that's what the psalmist says here. He begins by expressing who God is. If you look at verse 11, he says there, I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars.

[24 : 44] What's he saying there? Well, he's saying at that point, as he looks around himself, he's saying, all mankind are liars or they can't be trusted.

They can't be trusted. I can't trust anyone around me. It's a sorry situation to say that, but there are times when maybe we feel like that. I can't trust anybody.

I can't tell that person my own need that I have or my own sin that's going on in my life because I don't trust that they won't gossip or tell everybody else about my issue.

Broken trust is a horrible thing. And that's the situation that this psalmist is in. All mankind are liars. They cannot be trusted. But what he's also saying behind that is, but God can.

God can be trusted. And that is the God he is coming with his prayer to. The God who is gracious.

[25 : 51] Have you known the grace of God in your life? Have you praised him for his grace to you? We mentioned John Newton this morning as well.

Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. He's offering up his praise to God for his grace. How often do you thank God for his grace to you?

God is righteous. Again, how often do we pray to God because we know best Lord do this. Instead of saying, God, you are righteous.

You are the one who knows best. Lord, may your will be done. Not what I want, but yours. Or thinking of God who is merciful. Reflecting on these words.

God is merciful. Because what, as we pray, forgive our sins, we can easily just rattle these words off but not actually think, the consequences of my sin.

[27 : 06] The cost of my sin. What has it been? That God in his mercy to save me from my sin gave his own son.

to reflect on that. To reflect on that. The mercy of God. So our prayer, why should we love him?

Well, because of what he's done. Because of who he is. And then the psalmist reflects not just on who God is, but who he is in comparison.

The Lord, he says in verse 6, the Lord preserves the simple. The way he sees himself. Now simple, it sounds like almost a demeaning term.

Maybe the way we use it today, it is. But in reality, this word is applied to us all. God's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise, another psalm says.

[28 : 25] And here we see the same word. The Lord preserves the simple. Who are the simple? They are all mankind.

kind in the eyes of God. We are all simple beings. But God's word makes us simple wise.

God's word is powerful. And the more we see who God is, the more we see who we are. You think of Job in the Old Testament.

and the suffering that he went through. And there were times when he wanted to complain and did complain to God. But how did God respond to him?

Well, there's one incident in Job 38 where he says to Job, God says to Job, where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? And if that doesn't humble us as well as Job, where were we when God laid the foundation of the earth?

[29 : 38] And how could we possibly approach God and say, God, I know what is best in my life. This is what you need to do for me. That's not what it's about at all.

to love the Lord is to see who he is and to see his wisdom as far above our wisdom.

He is the one who delivers. As we see in verse 8, you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

Apart from God we can do nothing. Apart from him we are lost. Apart from him our eternity is one we don't even want to think about.

But it doesn't mean you can just put it away. Because there is an eternity before us all. And our destination for eternity how do we see God?

[30 : 45] Do you love the Lord? He is the one who is able to deliver your soul from death. That is who he is. He delivers through his love towards us in Jesus Christ.

Again, great passage in the New Testament, 1 John chapter 4. What is love? And what is God's love? Well, chapter 4 gives great, it's worth reading this evening if you want to go home and read it, but just a couple of verses from it.

Chapter 4, verse 9. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so we might live through him.

There is the love of God. There is a reason why we should love him. God sent his only son into this world so we might live through him.

he is the one who is able to deliver our soul from death. And then in verse 19, later on he says there, we love because he first loved us.

[32 : 00] It's not of ourselves, but it's because he first loved us. Why should we love him? because of who he is and what he has done for us.

So go back to the question, do you love the Lord? Or as it says in Matthew, what do you think about the Christ?

The Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. There is reason why we should love him. Finally, we want to see the third thing here is how.

How can you love him? Well, that's the question the psalmist asks in verse 12. What shall I render or what shall I give to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

There's the story of the ten lepers who were healed in the New Testament. How many came back to thank the Lord? Just one.

[33 : 09] one. The rest gave various reasons why they were healed, but none gave praise to the Lord but one. But here the psalmist says, what shall I give to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

Now, in a sense, when we read these words, we think, well, what can we possibly give to God? God? What can we possibly give to God in return?

For all his benefits to me, we feel we have nothing. But as we read in these words in this psalm, we see what God delights in his people giving to him.

What does the psalmist say, I will give in return to the Lord for his benefits? We could say there are three things. first, he will worship.

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

[34 : 18] What is he saying there? He is saying, well, Lord, in return for what you have done for me, I will worship you with all that I am.

There was obviously a ceremony going on here that was a very public ceremony, and it was probably maybe happening maybe every week, but in the ceremony there was this place where they would lift up the cup of salvation, they would take a drink, and they were giving praise to the Lord, and obviously in this way you were showing your love to God.

God, and what he's saying here is, I will delight in doing this. Now you can imagine we know it all too well ourselves, we want to be private Christians.

It's so easy for us to say, I have my faith, but I'll keep it to myself. if you are a Christian, that is not the way you are to live, because as the psalmist says here, if you love the Lord, your delight should be being among God's people, being with God's people, showing your love in returning worship to him, and not being afraid of it.

to say, well if the people of God are meeting, I want to be there. Because a day will come when you no longer be able to be there.

[36 : 02] A day will come when you maybe regret not being there. And so the psalmist is saying, what can I give to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

Not that I will go there and show how good I am. I'll make a point of being seen. Not that. But I will show my love to God by being with his people, praising his name, calling on his name, taking the cup of salvation, showing my love to him in this way.

If you love the Lord, that is what you are to do. What else can we give to the Lord? Well, we can give our service.

That's what we see then in verse 15 to verse 16, well, partly verse 17 as well. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

O Lord, I am your servant. I am your servant, the son of your maids servant. you have loosed my bonds. What's he saying here? Well, he's saying as long as I live, I will give you my all.

[37 : 24] Verse 15, again, there's a verse that we can easily misunderstand. And it seems almost out of context if we look at it in the wrong way. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

And we know, of course, that God's people are precious too. And every Christian's death is precious in the sight of the Lord.

But the better word to use there would be, instead of precious, costly. Costly in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

And if we see it like that, then we see it in the whole context of the psalm, where the psalmist is telling us, costly in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, I am your servant.

They go together, they're not two separate things. In other words, the Lord has saved him from being at a point close to death where he is now going to serve the Lord.

[38 : 27] The Lord has a purpose for him. And you think of maybe other walks of life, where people pass away.

For example, the entertainment business. And you hear of someone famous passing away and people make a big deal about it and say they are going to be such a loss to the entertainment world. Someone like a couple of years ago when Terry Wogan passed away, an outpouring of grief for him, and rightly so in many ways because of what he did for the entertainment industry and so much other things he was involved in.

And it's almost like a void is left, a void that cannot be filled. That's the way his death is seen. But what about the death of the Christian? That's the way it's talking about here.

Costly in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. In other words, it's going to leave a void.

They are going to be missed because they were such a servant for the Lord, whether it was in prayer, in preaching, in visiting, in ministry of all kinds of ways.

[39 : 41] They are going to leave a void now that they have passed on. Costly is the death of his saints. That's what these verses are saying.

And in light of that, how costly would your passing be or my passing be? Would people feel it? are we giving our all to the Lord?

Are we serving the Lord with all that we are? That is what the psalmist is saying here. O Lord, I am your servant.

I will give everything to you. I will serve you as long as I live. Again, in verse 9, he highlights that. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

God has a purpose for me in this land of the living. Paul says the same thing. For me to live is Christ.

[40 : 44] His longing is to go to be with him, but God had a purpose for him to remain. But he says to die is gain.

But while he is living, he is living for Christ, are you living for Christ? Are you serving the Lord with all that you are?

So we have worship, we have service, and then he closes with prayer. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of his people, in the courts of your house, O Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. What is he saying before that? He says, I will call on the name of the Lord. I will pray to the Lord. if you are struggling to pray, look to God's word, and see the reasons that you have to love the Lord. To be able to say, I love that the Lord hears my prayer. No matter what circumstances I am in, Lord, you have a purpose for me.

[42 : 06] Help me to be your servant as long as I am in the land of the living. Help me to worship. Help me to pray that we may be able to praise the Lord.

As the hymn writer says, when we see the love of God, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

That's what the psalmist is saying here. He has seen and knows the love of God. And he's saying that love demands my soul, my life, my all.

Do you love the Lord? Are you giving your all for him? Read these words. Draw near to God in prayer.

God, call on the name of the Lord, that he might help you to love him more and to serve him with all us. Let us ■■■■■