

Calling on the Lord's Name

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[0 : 0 0] So someone once said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Anyone got any clues who might have said that? No?

Come and ask me after the sermon. But it's not relevant who said it. But the point is, what is relevant is that a little reflection is actually good for us.

Maybe more reflection is better for us. Because it helps us to understand ourselves, doesn't it? Why we do certain things in life. How we relate to one another. What our strengths and weaknesses are.

Reflection on our own lives brings these things out. Because if we don't reflect, then we're actually no better than animals, are we? We're just charging ahead in life solely on the basis of our instincts or our desires.

And the psalm we're looking at today is all about reflecting, reflection. And I've sort of divided it into two broad sections. The first, from verses 1 to 11, is about the psalmist looking back, considering how the Lord has been good when times are bad or were bad.

[1 : 1 1] And then in verses 12 onwards, he reflects, looking forward, I guess, saying, how should I respond when the Lord has been good? Or in verse 12, what shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness?

But there is one phrase, actually, that runs through the entire psalm. And I don't know whether you've picked it up. And the phrase is, to call on the name of the Lord. It actually appears three, four times.

In verse 4, verse 13, and verse 17. But in the fourth time, or actually the first time, in verse 2, those are not the exact words. Rather, in that verse, the psalmist says that he will call on him as long as I live.

So not quite the same, but a similar idea. But the idea of calling on the name of the Lord runs right through the psalm. And I guess it's the big idea of the psalm.

We'll come back to that in due course. But let us begin then by looking at the first section, where the psalmist considers how the Lord has been good when times are bad.

[2 : 1 7] And we can see how bad things are when we read the first few verses, particularly verse 3, where he uses phrases like, Cords of death and the anguish of the grave. The cords of death entangled me, he says in verse 3, and the anguish of the grave came over me.

And so I think the picture we get is of this person, in one sense, minding his own business, living his life, and then out of nowhere, a death like an octopus reaches out with its tentacles and starts to drag him in to the grave.

Now, we're not told exactly what the situation is. So it could literally be life-threatening, maybe an illness or, you know, an enemy coming for him. Or it could just be figurative, like emotional stress or the loss of a loved one.

But whatever it is, what it does is that it overwhelms him and he's overcome, he says, with distress and sorrow. And so if you've been with us over the last few weeks looking at book 5, it's quite similar, isn't it, to the people in Psalm 107, that very first week where we looked at book 5.

For he cries out in his distress and God comes to his help. But in here in Psalm 116, the phrase that is used is different to that in 107, because here he specifically calls on the name of the Lord.

[3 : 39] So he says in verse 4, Lord, or Yahweh, save me. Now names are very important, aren't they? I have nothing against the name Andrew.

I don't. But if you kept calling me Andrew, I'm going to get pretty annoyed, wouldn't I? And eventually I might even ignore you. And that's because we're all identified by our names.

It marks us out from the rest of humanity. It sort of captures who we are as individuals. Our personalities, our qualities, even signifying our personal history.

And that is similar here with the Lord's name. When the psalmist calls on his name, what he does is he's calling on someone specific. This is not an unknowable spirit that he's calling on, but Yahweh, God, a person.

This is a God who has revealed himself to Israel and who has tied himself specifically to actions in history. And it is from his words and his actions that we are able to know who this God is, this Yahweh is.

[4 : 49] So that in verse 5, the psalmist can say, the Lord is gracious and righteous. Our God is full of compassion. He's experienced it himself, but he's also seen it in his work in history.

In fact, I think that actually the psalmist has taken these very qualities because God himself revealed them to his people. So in Exodus chapter 34 and verse 6, for example, which I've got on the slide, when Moses was with God on Mount Sinai, he passed in front of Moses and proclaimed this.

He said, The Lord, the Lord, calling himself the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

So there we have God's own description of himself as compassionate and gracious. And over and over again, we see these qualities in God when the Lord saves.

So in verse 6, he comes to the aid of the unwary, that is, those who are vulnerable, the simple, and he saves them in the depth of their despair. But in the case of Israel and the psalmist, the Lord is prompted to act, not just based on his character of graciousness and compassion, the Lord saves, and he saves this psalmist because he's bound to Israel by covenant.

[6 : 11] And that's where we get the name Yahweh from. Now I don't know about you, but I find it really hard to ignore someone when they call out to me. Jimmy.

There you go. He's just reacted. Even when you don't particularly like a person, I mean, it's... I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about me.

We still find that you just have to respond instinctively, don't you? But for me as a father, there are actually two people whom I'm bound to respond and help whenever they use the relational name, my relational name with them.

That name is Daddy. And when Emma and Lauren calls out Daddy, it actually compels me to respond. I actually don't have a choice.

But that's because I don't want to have a choice. When I chose to become their father, I chose not to have a choice, if that makes sense. I decided to bind myself to them in relationships so that whenever they call, I will respond.

[7 : 19] And boy, do they call out in some rather inconvenient times sometimes. But that's what Yahweh has done for the people of Israel. He has bound himself to them so that whenever they call on his name, this name which is given to them, Yahweh, he responds not only because of his character, but also because he's in covenant with them.

Yahweh is the name that identifies that relationship with them. For the rest of humanity, God relates to them as creator to creation. But with Israel, God is in covenant with them.

So over and above the common grace, which God extends to all humanity, God shows his special grace to Israel. And with that comes the special promise to save.

In fact, the people of Israel only know to call him by the name Yahweh because God himself chose to reveal that name to them in the first place.

And so in verse 1, we see that the Lord is to them, to the psalmist, but also to Israel, like an attentive parent. I love the Lord, he says, for he has heard my voice.

[8 : 31] He heard me cry for mercy because he turned his ear to me. I will call on him as long as I live. I think we've all heard mothers say this, haven't we, that many of them can distinguish their own baby's cry even in a room filled with other babies and toddlers.

Yeah? Well, that's the picture of Yahweh here. He's got his ear tuned to his people. He's almost leaning forward in heaven, listening out for the faintest of cries from his people.

And so no wonder the psalmist can respond by saying that he loves the Lord. These are deep emotions that the psalmist feels and uses. Now here again, I think the psalmist is actually echoing God's own words.

So on the next slide, we have God's own words when he spoke at the dedication of Solomon's temple. So in 2 Chronicles 7 and 14, God says this as the temple was being dedicated.

He says, If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

[9 : 42] Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. Do you hear the echoes there? If my people who are called by my name, the name of Yahweh, and then later on, then I will hear from heaven.

I will, my ears will be attentive to their prayers in this place. Now every time I try out a new barber or hairstylist, there's always a sense of trepidation within me.

I see all the perfectly, you know, cut heads on the wall, haircuts, but not knowing how well a job they would do on me sort of scares me a little.

Now I know you're looking at me and going, well, you know, what has he really got to worry about? There's not much there to work with. But be that as it may, if at the end, I come out and I like what I see, then I have sort of a bit more confidence in going back to this barber or hairstylist next time around, right?

Next time when I go, I'll be less nervous. I'll be more trusting because he's done a good job before. Well, I think that's the same thing happening here. The first time the psalmist calls on the name of the Lord, he may or may not know what to expect.

[10 : 52] But having experienced God's salvation once, he has greater confidence the next time he calls on the name of the Lord. That's why he can say in verse 1, because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him again.

In fact, as long as I live. You see, he's learned to trust the Lord and this goes on in verse 7 and 8 as well, when he says to himself, return to your rest, my soul.

Why is that? Why can you do that? Because the Lord has been good. You've seen that. So you see how he's using advice to himself based on past experience. He goes on to say, for you, Lord, and here he's turning to the Lord in prayer, you have delivered me from death, my years from tears, my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

So again here, he's trusting the Lord again because God has come true, the Lord has come true for him before. And I think that's, verse 10 suggests that indeed that's what's happened subsequently for when another trial came along, he said, I trusted in the Lord when I said, I'm greatly afflicted.

In my alarm, I said, everyone is a liar. He's experienced the lies of everyone else, but not with the Lord. The Lord has kept his word and therefore he can be trusted.

[12 : 05] And so friends, I think we can learn from this pattern how we are to respond when trials do come. I know when they come, we sometimes group about emotions and we let emotions dictate our choices.

But instead, what we should practice is what the psalmist does here, the discipline of reminding ourselves of God's past goodness and using it to steady our soul, tell ourselves that because God has saved us in the past, we can trust him to keep doing it.

We should make that resolution now before we hit the trial that we will keep calling on the name of the Lord because we've experienced his goodness. Now, I want to pause here for a moment just to say that unlike Israel, the name that we are to call upon now is actually the name of the Lord Jesus.

For Israel, God revealed himself to them as Yahweh. But for us, God has revealed himself to us by his son, Jesus, the one born of Mary, the one that we're going to celebrate Christmas in a few days.

And his is the name that God the Father has appointed for us to call upon. The name, as we know, means God saves. Jesus means God saves. And it is this name that the angel actually gave to Joseph, telling him that that's how you should name the baby.

[13 : 29] And if people remember, do you know what the angel said the reason was? Name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. And that's why Paul, in our second reading, the New Testament reading, said in Romans chapter 10 and 13, he said this, For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And I think I've got the verse up there so you can read it. But what is the name of the Lord?

Well, we have to go back up to verse 9 and I've got another slide to show you in orange. Yep. Verse 9 says this, If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

So everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But what is that name? That name is Jesus. And just as God has bound himself to Israel to save anyone who calls on the name of Yahweh in that time, so now God binds himself to save anyone, Jew or Gentile, who calls on the name of his son Jesus.

So please remember, we're not calling on any generic God that's out there, but specifically the one God has revealed to us, his son Jesus.

[14 : 45] The idea that any or every path leads to God is not true. It's false. Only those who call on the name of Jesus will be saved. And what Jesus saves us from is our sin.

That's what the angel said. And more specifically, he saves us from the judgment that comes from our sin, from us turning our backs against God. And I think one of the biggest dangers we face in life, and I think a lot of Australians have this view, is that we're not actually that focused on death at all, are we?

Life's pretty good for most, and we're not confronted with the prospect of death on a day-to-day basis like people in war-torn countries or poor countries are.

And even with the rubbed shoulders with death, let's say we lose a loved one, death is rarely seen as that fearsome menace to be avoided at all costs. Rather, I think many people see it as this sort of nothingness that we just drift into when we die.

That's a product of our secular age, of atheism. And so there's no longer any fear of what lies beyond this life. Or if there is, it's sort of not really spoken about.

[16 : 04] But friends, I want to say that the judgment beyond death is a reality. And all of us will have to give an account of our life before God. So if today you have not called on the name of Jesus, well, can I urge you to come and speak to me afterwards or start asking questions of the person next to you.

Call on the name of Jesus before it's too late. Call on Him because that is the only name by which we can be saved. Now for the rest of us, well, let's return to the second half of this psalm because here we discover that those who have been saved, those who have called on the name of the Lord, we discover how they should respond in life.

And the words that the psalmist uses himself is this, what shall I return to the Lord for all His goodness to me? Now I don't think that the word return here means that we need to somehow return God's favor like someone just bought you a Christmas present and you're sort of scrambling around trying to buy a gift to return to them.

No, I think the idea here is more about having the right response of knowing how to live in light of God's goodness. And the answer is again, just like in part one, to call on the name of the Lord.

And so the psalmist says he'll do that in verses 14 and 18. Except in this case, as opposed to the first section, we are to do it as a habit in our lives. We are to make it a constant feature of our lives to call on His name, not just when things are bad, but as a way of life.

[17 : 35] Now there are other actions that are being talked about in those verses from 13 to 19. So we have phrases like lifting the cup of salvation, fulfilling vows to the Lord, sacrificing a thank offering. These are, we don't have time to go into that because remember I cut the sermon down.

These are simply acts of worship which are described in the Old Testament which are sort of referred to in Leviticus. but they go, they're part of, and parcel of, and goes with calling on the name of the Lord.

And they're done corporately as they gather around the temple and in Jerusalem. But what these actions and calling on the name of the Lord shows is that the psalmist is worshipping the Lord.

He wants to be a servant of the Lord. It's an expression of his ongoing trust and loyalty in the one who has saved him. And this declaration is exactly what he does in verses 15 to 16.

For there he says that he's the Lord's faithful servant. And so, just as Yahweh binds himself to his people in covenant, the psalmist too is now binding himself as it were to the Lord.

[18 : 44] Actually the word is, the word servant which I've used is actually a little weak in the NIV. For actually, it means a bond servant, a slave. And not just a slave, but he's actually a slave whose mother herself has been a female or a bond servant slave.

But notice that he says that this is a slavery which actually frees him. He says he's been freed from his chains. He has found true freedom in becoming a slave of the Lord, in serving the Lord.

He's found, I think in particular, freedom from the fear of death that was threatening him in the earlier part of the psalm. Now verse 15 seems a bit odd when you first read it, but I think what it means is that, well I'll read it first, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servant.

I don't think it so much means that the Lord values those who remain faithful to him in death, although that's true. Rather, I think because the death of a faithful servant is a costly thing or a precious thing to the Lord, the Lord will see to it that his life is preserved, his or her life is preserved until his time is truly up.

And that's why the psalmist says that he does not need to fear death because God himself will watch over him and he will only die when his time is truly up.

[20 : 12] Now, as followers of Jesus, all those sacrifices that are being talked about, we don't need to do those anymore as part of our daily worship. Jesus has done that on our behalf and we are saved as a result of that.

But I think we're still called to be a servant of the Lord to, as Paul says in Romans chapter 12, to offer ourselves, our bodies, as a living sacrifice to the Lord. And as part of that, we are to call on the name of the Lord for that is the name by which we are saved.

I know that in our places of work today or even at school or in public places, we do indeed hear the name of the Lord, don't we? But it's being used as a swear word.

And I find it really ironic because if only they knew, this is actually the name that will save them. And yet they use it because they've just stubbed their toe or something. How ironic and how sad.

But friends, what about us? What about us who know the true power of the name of the Lord Jesus? We should make it a habit to keep using it, shouldn't we?

[21 : 22] To call on Him, to cry out to Him for help, to shout it out loud in thanksgiving when we move around in our places of work to use it to share about our faith so that people recognize who it is that is our Lord.

We of all people, we are the ones who need to be calling on the name of the Lord more profusely, more prolifically than anyone else.

So let me encourage you to do that, not to be afraid of the name of Jesus because that is the name that will save. Whenever and wherever we can, let us call on the name of the Lord. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Son Jesus and we thank You that You've revealed Him to us and it is by His name that we are saved. Help us to have great confidence in that name for it is the name that not only saves us but it is the name by which Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Help us to share it with others. Help us to use it when we testify of Your goodness in our lives. Help us not to be afraid of this name, this great and glorious name, the name of Jesus whom we serve with all our lives.

[22 : 41] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.