

The Lord Who Hears and Answers

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 0 0] 110. We'll look at the whole psalm. The psalm, of course, that, well, we see in the English anyway. I love the Lord. I love the Lord. One of the highlights of the prayer meeting on Wednesday evening, last Wednesday evening, was when one of those, one of the prayer group prayed. And she began in her prayer by thanking God for answering prayer. Thanking God for answered prayer. It was a real joy. It was a real joy to hear these words uttered in that little prayer group, to hear words uttered publicly and to hear these words uttered joyfully.

Because in that expression of thanks to God, there was that acknowledgement that, yes, God hears and God answers prayer. And yet, you know, when we look to our own prayer life, when we even look to the way that we come before God with thanksgiving, of course, the question has to be asked, do we? I mean, don't we so infrequently bow before God and give him thanks for all his goodness to us? How infrequently do we come before God with thanksgiving in our hearts and saying, Lord, thank you. Thank you for answering my prayer. Thank you for responding to my pleas and pleading before you with your answers in your perfect way, in your perfect timing for your perfect glory.

And I suppose because, you know, so infrequently do we come before God, maybe it's because we so rarely do come before God in prayer and lack that spirit of thanksgiving in our hearts.

Well, in the psalm here that, you know, most of us, I know, have sung on many occasions, whether it's the older version, the newer version, here in the psalm, here's this anonymous individual and he's expressing thanksgiving and he's expressing thanksgiving before God, you might say, spontaneously, joyfully, delighting to come before God who has answered his prayers.

And as we'll see in a moment, these prayers that were offered unto God, prayers that were uttered in adversity, prayers, obviously, as we again see from the language used, prayers that were uttered over a period of time, but prayers that were offered from the heart, prayers offered before God in the knowledge that God does not turn away anyone who comes before him with that humility of heart and comes before him in that spirit of expectation, that spirit of thankfulness, that spirit of coming before God, seeking his will, seeking his answer.

[3 : 1 0] And, you know, I suggest that you and I use this prayer, even the very words of this prayer itself, even when we find ourselves in times of adversity, that we take portions of this psalm, obviously, according to the various circumstances that we find ourselves in, and that we use these divinely inspired words to come before God, and as it were, to give back God the words that he's given to us.

You know, the person who wrote this psalm, it's very interesting. You can find a number of phrases that's used in this psalm that you find in other psalms. Obviously, he used psalms, word portions from other psalms, when he came before God in this particular psalm.

So, don't be afraid to use the very words of Scripture when you come before God, whether it's in your sorrow, whether it's in your joy. Even use the word of God in your prayers, because we come before the Lord who hears.

That's our first point in verses 1 and 2. We said that the person who ever wrote this psalm actually borrowed phrases from other psalms that obviously he knew, obviously he sang.

That's what we find right at the start of this psalm. In fact, even through it, he's obviously borrowed from Psalm 18. Because at the start of Psalm 18, we're told of David being delivered from his enemies, and on the very day of his deliverance, he addresses words to God.

[4 : 39] And he begins with that spontaneity of heart. I love you, Lord. Then he goes on to sing about his wonderful deliverance from death, just as we find here in Psalm 116, speaking of that individual's deliverance from a very particular time of crisis in his life.

Just look at the expression at the start of Psalm 116 there that we also find in Psalm 18. I love you, Lord, as we find here. I mean, in Psalm 18, David had revealed this true heart before God.

His true heart's affection for God. God, obviously, who delivered him? Psalm 116, the same expressions used, the same expression of love in response to God's delivering this individual from real danger.

But when you look at Psalm 116, how it begins, it looks very simple, but actually utterly profound. It's all it begins with is the words, I love. You go to the original language, and that's something I hadn't realised.

I prepared this sermon on Thursday. I hadn't actually realised how the language is constructed here. But it begins simply, I love. I love because the Lord hears my voice.

[5 : 59] Now, I don't think there's any doubt at all he's telling of his love for the Lord. But this particular way that he writes this opening line, this expression of love, then I have to, you know, we really do have to take stock in what's happening here.

I love because the Lord hears my voice. You see the same construction in the New Testament. Remember when the Apostle John writes in 1 John 4, 19, we love because God first loved us.

You know, surely what we're seeing in this form of words is an intense love for the Lord because of his love for us. The psalm writer here is Psalm 116.

He's so overwhelmed with the love of God for him, that love seen in his rescue, rescue from some sort of mortal danger that he's simply crying out, I love.

It's that love that the true believer directs first and foremost towards God and towards others. It's the whole of life love we would see.

[7 : 07] That whole of life love that loves the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all our mind, with our neighbour as ourselves.

That self-giving love that we show to others. If you love the Lord Jesus, then you and I are called to live a life of love.

Love for God. Love for your neighbour as ourselves. That love that's lived in response to the love of God in saving sinners such as ourselves.

And you see that love, that love that characterises a believer's life, it's responsive love. Notice here, we love because, we love because he first loved us.

Look at the first person, I love because he hears. So think of, you know, our love to God, our love, that love's in response to God, to God whose love's been seen, and love that continues to be seen in his active, ongoing relationship with each one of his, each one of his people.

[8 : 22] I mean, the psalm writer here is obviously recounting a very difficult situation that he's had in his life, that very difficult situation that's prompted him to call out to God, and for God to come to him and to rescue him from.

In fact, you see that right throughout the psalm. But as we said, in the original language, the first line tells of the Lord who hears, I love because the Lord hears my voice.

In other words, the psalm writer's recalling an occasion in the past when God heard him and helped him, but the psalm writer continues to affirm that the Lord still hears me.

You know, the Lord who has heard continues to hear. The Lord who has helped you, who's helped you in the past, continues to help you. Why?

Because he loves you with an eternal love. Because the Lord has heard and continues to hear, because he answers the prayers of his people, his followers, then, as the psalm writer tells us here, he's resolved to call on God as long as he lives.

[9 : 31] See that in verse 2. Now this isn't obviously, this isn't an isolated example of someone with a wholehearted resolve to give his whole of life commitment to God.

You go to other psalms and you see other examples of writers who are expressing their eternal, everlasting commitment to serve God.

Think of David in Psalm 63, because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you, so I will bless you as long as I live. The writer of Psalm 104, verse 43, I will sing to the Lord as long as I live.

I will sing praise to my God while I have being. Psalm 146, same sentiment. But what of yourself? What of your commitment to call on God all the days of your life?

What of your resolve to serve from each and every day while you have breath? You know, we can so often make promises before God, particularly in times of crisis.

[10 : 40] Maybe after, or maybe after some marvelous deliverance that we've had from some kind of catastrophe, and we promise, yes Lord, I'll call you all the days of my life, I'll call on you every day of my life.

But then we fail to keep to these promises when the crisis has passed, and we're delivered from that, whatever catastrophes happen. Yet, you know, when we think of everyday matters of life, so often we strive to keep commitment to these things.

Last week, I keep talking about this, but it was quite significant, last week at the conference I attended, the Positively Presbyterian Conference. One of the speakers is a sports chaplain, in fact, he's the head sports chaplain in Scotland, and he spoke to us about, at one time anyway, in his past, his multiple difficulties, certainly at one time in his life, he spoke of a downward spiral of self-doubt and depression, and even at one point considering taking his own life.

Through God's deliverance, through God's rescuing him from his darkness, he spoke of the many ways in which he was restored. He spoke of his daily walk with God.

He spoke of his constant coming before God in prayer. He spoke of spiritual therapy, we might use that expression. He also spoke of physical therapy, walking, walking with the dog, enjoying God's creation.

[12 : 12] And then he said something that seemed wonderful, in fact. He spoke of using a Fitbit. He spoke of the activity tracker, of course, as you know, who'd help you to stay motivated, maintaining your fitness.

And he said he has an everyday target, he's got the target of 10,000 steps, and if at the end of the day he hasn't reached his 10,000 steps, if he's just even a few short, he'll go out and make sure that he's reached his target.

He's fully committed to maintaining his health through that exercise target. He claims he's never missed it once since he started. Every day while he still has breath, he's going to keep to that target.

Now, if that's the case for physical fitness, which of course is important, physical fitness, mental fitness even, how much more, how much more should you and I be focused on our spiritual fitness?

how much more should you and I be focused on that close walk with God by a regular spiritual exercise, with regular spiritual coming before God, walking with God, that resolve, that wholehearted commitment to call on his name as long as this shall live?

[13 : 24] Well, the psalm writer here is Psalm 116, he certainly committed his life to that daily walk with God, daily service in God's name, daily communion with God, because of the fact that the Lord had heard and answered his prayer and continues to hear and answer his prayer.

And so we find this larger section, verse 3 to verse 11, this praise of the Lord who serves. I mean, the writer here, he explains the depth of his distress and anguish, that time in his life that caused him to cry out to God in prayer.

I mean, he speaks here of, I've been near death, the snares of death encompass me. He mentions Sheol, the place of the dead. He speaks of distress, he speaks of anguish, and he uses what we might call very strong verbs to bring out the desperate condition that he was in.

If you just look at the way he speaks of his condition, look at the verbs he's used, encompass, laid hold of, suffered. I mean, the whole tenor of his language, well, it's unmistakable.

It was this aggressive picture of some massive time of danger that he experienced. Now, we don't know exactly what he was suffering from. It might have been some dreadful illness, it could have been some horrendous experience that when he felt there was no way out of.

[14 : 57] It was only comfort to him, the name of the Lord, the name to which he was calling and kept on calling. Oh Lord, I pray, deliver my soul, end of verse 4.

There's several things to note here. First thing is this, this man's troubles were real, whether it was concerning pain of mind, whether it was some physical illness, whether it was some danger from some external source, we're not told, maybe deliberately not told, the word, because this psalm that we find here, it's not just relevant for one person, it's relevant for all who call the name of the Lord.

I mentioned the conference there that I was at, and very much the focus of that conference was on the mind, the mind and the Christian. And one of our speakers, in fact the main speaker from Wales, he spoke very movingly about his work in therapeutic counselling, he spoke of dealing with people who come to him with particular mental issues, minds troubled, perhaps with some unresolved issue from the past that plagued that individual.

And whatever the problems and the tortures of the minds of these individuals, they were real, they were real, real problems. Many of us know, I'm sure even in our own lives, mental illness as somehow even lesser than physical illness.

And so we bring the compassion of Christ to those who are suffering even in mental illness. But you know, even when the mind isn't in a torturous state, we're still called to renew our minds.

[16 : 49] That's what we're thinking of on Wednesday evening. We're still commanded to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we'll discern the will of God. And that renewing of our minds involves us exercising responsibilities in that process of transformation.

And one of the processes of transformation is a close walk with God, in communion with God, in communion with Him in prayer, through His Word, in knowing Him, in knowing Him more, in growing in understanding more, in understanding of God more, communicating with Him more, and strengthening the more to trust in Him as we live by faith.

And here in this psalm, this man who was in such distress, he did exactly that. He communed with God. Yes, he was weak even in his calling upon God, but he still had that strength to call on the name of the Lord, to call on God and to seek Him.

That's what you and I are called to do, even when we're in distress of any sort, to keep calling on God, to keep persevering in prayer to God who hears prayer and answers prayer.

When this man kept calling on God, then I called on the name of the Lord, the language again used that speaks of continuous calling on God. He wasn't going to give up.

[18 : 18] He wasn't going to give up on his pleading before God to release him from his troubles. He's continually calling on God to deliver his soul from death. That's why we read in Luke chapter 18, Jesus teaching on the persistence of prayer, prayer before God, even in distressing situations, that parable of the persistent widow.

Remember, as we read from the start of that parable when Jesus said that we ought always to pray and not lose heart. that persistent widow who continued to plead before this unjust judge for justice.

And her constant pleas were being rejected. Then finally the judge exasperated by this woman's persistence, he relented and he gives her the justice she was asking for.

Of course God isn't an unjust judge. He's not exasperated by your prayers. But the point of the parable remembers that if an unjust judge, if he should finally give somebody justice, how much more our God and Saviour who gives to us what we plead for from the heart when that which we plead for is in agreement with his will.

So as with the teaching of Jesus, parable, so with this psalm here. Even when at first our prayers don't appear to be answered, we continue to come before God.

[19 : 46] even when there's no sign of an immediate answer that we're praying for. Nevertheless, continue before him in prayer. Don't give up. I mean the very fact of continuing prayer, surely that in itself is a sign that your heart is genuine in its confidence in the God who can and will answer our prayers.

That's what the psalm writer is saying there in verse 10. And he says that he believed even when he was afflicted. In other words, he still maintained his trust and hope in God, even in the depths.

Even when others were telling him, don't put your hope in God. Even when they were saying, you know, God is silent before you, which I think is probably what we mean is meant there in verse 11.

I mean, this individual could still affirm that God is Lord, even in the depths of his distress. Why could he affirm that God is Lord, even in these depths?

Well, because he knew God. He knew who God is in this character. You see that in verses 5 to 7.

[21 : 00] Gracious is the Lord, righteous. He knew that God is gracious. He knew that God is righteous. He knew that God is merciful. He knew that God preserves the simple-hearted. He knew that God saves him.

But when you come before God in prayer, remember who you're approaching. Sometimes we come before God in prayer so glibly and not recognizing who it is to whom we come before.

You're approaching, I'm approaching the God of the universe, the creator God, the eternal God, the God into whose presence he's permitted you to come through the Lord Jesus Christ, through the door.

God is no terror to those who come to him in faith. As we've seen here, as the psalmist tells us, he is the God of all grace.

He is the God who's all righteous, who's all merciful. He's the God who keeps the heart of those who are simple-minded. He saves, he deals bountifully.

[22 : 08] In other words, he does for us more than we can ask or think. This is the Lord who hears your prayers. And so unto this psalm writer here, God showed his grace and his mercy and his salvation.

He showed it in what we find in verse 8. He showed his grace and his mercy and salvation in delivering him. As we see in verse 8, again, look at the wonderful way that the writer here expresses the joy of knowing what God has done for him.

Wiping away his tears, keeping him steady, keeping him upright when he was about to fall. And that's why we sang in Psalm 56 because here's the echo from another psalm, Psalm 56, the psalm that David wrote when he spoke of the mercy of God and delivering his soul from death and God keeping his feet from falling.

and so David, because of that, resolved to walk before God all his life. You know, we've been looking at the character of God there even in these verses 5 to 8.

We confess all these things about the character of God, but do you truly know him as the gracious, righteous, merciful, saviour, abundant in love.

[23 : 35] You know, it should be your experience when you testify to the character of God, even the character of God that's seen and shown in your life. Because, you know, when you reflect on the goodness of God that's been shown to you in the past and the present, well, you can and must come before him and bow before him in adoration because he's revealed to you his character, he continues to reveal to you his character.

He's shown you that he is the God of all mercy. His mercies are new every morning, so that you can truly and triumphantly say, great is your faithfulness, is your coming before the Lord who saves.

But then when we think of our coming before God, the Lord to whom we serve in verses 12 to 19, then we have to ask, how do we show our gratitude before the Lord to save us?

Well, notice here verse 12, the psalm writer has been delivered from this particular difficult situation in his life, and he asks a rhetorical question.

That's the kind of question we might ask when somebody has done something wonderful for us. What can I give you? What can I give you in repayment? What can I give to you as an expression of my gratitude for doing something kind for me?

[25 : 05] A week past Saturday, many of us attended our church outing at Ernest and House, and those of you who were there remember the fantastic facilities we were provided for, we were given much of the grounds to use, even to shelter in the orangery, to shelter in, to eat in.

It was all free. It was all free. We didn't pay anything to the Dundas. And I can say this, as a deacon's court, we've decided to send out a small thank you gift with a letter of appreciation for the kindness we were shown for that free gift.

And the Samuiter here, he wanted to show his gratitude to God for the free gift of salvation that he received when he was brought low and was saved.

And the answer, when he asked, what can I give you, Lord? The answer was the answer that surely we hear when we consider ourselves, when we consider the great free gift of salvation of the Lord Jesus.

What can I give? And the answer is, I'll take. What shall I give to the Lord for all his benefits to me? And the answer is, we find here, I will take.

[26 : 28] Verse 13. What am I to give back to the Lord? I will take. I mean, look at verse 13. The Samuiter here is saying that he's going to lift up the cup of salvation.

The word actually is take, literally take. He's going to take the cup of salvation. So what he's saying is what you and I can see in our expression of gratitude to the Lord for his saving us.

What can I, what can I give? I'll take. What can I give? I'll take the cup of salvation. I'll take the gift. I'll take the gift that God has given me.

I'll take in my hands the blessing of his salvation and I'll drink from it for my good and for his glory. When Jesus was in the upper room, remember the night in which he was betrayed by Jesus took the cup from which wine was drunk at that Passover meal.

He took the cup and remember he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood, all of you drink from it. Of course it's much more than just a physical drinking of Passover wine.

[27 : 37] It surely meant more, it meant the receiving of the gospel of grace made possible by the shedding of his blood on the cross. It's for you, it's for me to show our gratitude to God for our salvation by taking the cup of his grace and to drink from the cup of his salvation to receive the blessings, the blessings of salvation made possible by the death of the Lord Jesus.

In a couple of weeks time, the Lord's people here are going to be at the table, the area set aside to remember the Lord's death till he comes. Part of that service of course is taking the cup of wine and in taking that cup making profession of your faith in the Lord Jesus.

And that taking, that lifting up of the cup, a profession of faith, showing others around that you love the Lord Jesus.

And in taking that cup, resolving to follow and to continue to follow the Lord Jesus, your Saviour. the Saviour.

The Saviour here, for us of course, it's not for us, it's not for any of the Lord's people to show ingratitude to God for that great salvation.

[29 : 01] I mean, the Saviour here is vowing to take the cup of salvation and to delight in the blessing of God all his days. And in doing that, he's going to call on the name of the Lord all his days.

He's going to make it known before others that he's so blessed. Therefore, he's going to make this public profession before others and showing his commitment to God that you see there in verses 13 and 14.

That's surely for you and I who take and drink from the cup of God's grace. That you and I maintain that constant communion with God.

to be consistent in making known to others whose you are and who you follow. It's not for any of us to remain ungrateful to God for all his benefits towards us.

We think of the free salvation, that free salvation in Christ. Free, of course, to us who receive, but costly for the one who gave his life, even the very life of the Lord Jesus for us.

[30 : 06] You know, in life, we'll be shown much kindness from many people and we'll want to show them gratitude in tangible ways.

Even to members of the Scottish nobility who showed much kindness to a small congregation in West Lodham. Well, how much more? How much more should you and I desire continually to show our gratitude to the Lord of Lords and King of Kings for the free gift of salvation made possible through the Lord Jesus Christ?

Because that's the correct way. That's the only response to the gift of salvation in Christ. And the psalm writer here, he makes his vow to take the blessings of God and to use them in service, service for the Saviour.

And he's stating this as a servant of the Lord. He's showing his true humility before God. He's saying this in the very last segment of the psalm that he's going to live in sacrificial service to the one who saved him.

As you and I are called to sacrificial service, serving the one who saved us, who gave his life for us, rescuing you from spiritual death.

[31 : 27] But yet, what do we find here? The psalmist here who's praised God for God rescuing him from death. Notice here, it seems at first anyway, when we come down to verse 14, everything seems to be straightforward, the saving from death.

But then verse 15, all of a sudden it seems as if there's a break precious in the sight of the Lord as the death of the saints. And you might think this is a bit of a strange insertion here, it doesn't seem at first as you might think to fit in with all that's already been said about being rescued from death.

But it does fit and fits perfectly. I think we need to explain this here. I mean the psalm writer has spoken earlier of being a hair's breadth away from going to Sheol, in other words being consigned to the grave.

But he didn't die. Not there and then. Yes, of course he knows he's going to at some point taste death. He knows at some point he's going to know physical death.

He is one of God's saints. He's one of God's precious people. Such that when his death does come it will be meaningful. I mean he's been so close to death he's been rescued from it.

[32 : 47] I mean obviously God's preserved his life for a purpose in glorifying God just as when this man's death would come that in itself would serve to glorify God.

Because the death of God's people is of importance to God. That God will permit the death of his people to happen in his time and for his glory.

God will think of the apostle Peter. Remember when Jesus told him of his death even before that death happened and Jesus gave an explanation in John 21 that Jesus said Jesus did this to show what kind of death Peter would glorify God.

And that principle surely is for all of God's people. Even the death of God's saints is precious for those who've lived well and who die well to God's glory.

That's a great comfort to all who are his. Even our deaths when they come will be a means of bringing glory to God. The psalm writer here he experienced God's grace, he experienced God's mercy.

[33 : 57] He's been saved from death and he's resolved now to serve God all his days until his death comes. And so he concludes the psalm with this great expression, this great Hebrew expression, hallelujah, praise the Lord.

And surely in any conclusion of any service when we've been considering the grace and mercy of God that you and I conclude, not calling out orally but certainly from the heart, to cry out hallelujah, praise the Lord for all his goodness to me.

I ask you, is that your response to God? Is that your expression of gratitude to God that the desire of your heart is to praise him? Or is there just silence?

Or even a turning back from the God of all grace? I pray that if there's anyone here who cannot yet praise God, praise God from the heart, that you can't rejoice and the one who saves you, that you'll call upon him, you'll come to him, you'll call upon him in truth, and that you in giving your life to him, will cry out, praise the Lord, hallelujah, for all your goodness to me, in saving my soul from death.

Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Truly, Lord, your people can utter before you, I love the Lord because he has heard my
voice and my pleas for mercy.

[35 : 39] Truly, Lord, your people can cry out from the heart that they love you because you hear
and continue to hear, you help and continue to help and you save and you continue to
save your people.

So that is the great message of the gospel, the gospel of the Lord Jesus. The gospel that
saves and continues to save. Lord, blessed be your name for all your goodness to us.

Blessed be the Lord for all that you have done for us and in us through the Lord Jesus. So
help us, Lord, to live lives of gratitude by taking from the cup of salvation, from
appropriating that cup, using that cup, the blessing of God, the grace of God, living by that
grace all the days of our lives.

So hear us, Lord, as we call upon you and we pray your forgiveness for our many sins.
We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.