

I love the Lord

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[0:00] I want us now to turn to Psalm 116 from the book of Psalms.

Psalm 116 at the beginning of the psalm. I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

I love the Lord. When we look at the various psalms and work our way through the book of Psalms, sometimes it is reasonably obvious where the psalm comes from.

It has a historical context. There are elements within the psalm that help us decipher who the author is and when he wrote and composed the psalm and what the circumstances were that gave rise to the words that are expressed.

But that is not always the case. Very often we may read through a psalm and we do not know who composed it. We do not know when it was composed.

[1:25] We do not know why it was composed. And some people take late pressure in sitting down and trying to work out if there are any clues within the psalm itself.

And sometimes they go to great lengths. They'll focus on statements that are made that may help pinpoint the historical time frame.

Sometimes they're restricted to the use of words. And they'll say these words were not really in common usage until such and such a time.

And this psalm here is not a psalm that's easily identified as to authorship or historical context.

And some of the subject matter is so general that it could be composed at any time.

[2:34] For example, when you think about some of the comments that have been made concerning the psalm, some have said this psalm was probably composed when Hezekiah, the king, experienced restoration or deliverance.

It's a psalm of thanksgiving for the deliverance that he enjoyed. A certain branch of the Jews believe that the psalm was composed following the Babylonian exile.

And that it is a psalm that speaks about the joy that belongs to God's people having experienced deliverance at God's hand. Well, the fact is that there could be any of these things.

But the opening statement, it could be made by anyone. But not just anyone.

It could be and should be made only by those who know the Lord sufficiently well to be able to say of the Lord that they love Him.

[3:53] And it may be that those who know the Lord sometimes understand that as those who know the Lord, that they should be able to say, I love the Lord, but they may not feel able to do that, or at least to say it.

John Owen, the Puritan, was someone who, in his meditations, came across or read through this psalm.

And just in his general reading. And when he read these words, I love the Lord, he paused.

And he said, this is cause for meditation. And the meditation led him down the road of asking himself the question.

I've read this. I've said this. Now, what is it that makes me say that?

[5:15] I love the Lord because, the psalmist says. Because what? Why can I say it? Why can you say it, if you can say it?

I love the Lord because. Because. And the conclusion that Owen came to was this. The saints do not love the Lord for nothing.

There is reason for them to love the Lord. And when you grasp that as a truth, that there is a reason to love the Lord, then the ground or the opportunity to explore these reasons is almost infinite.

Now, I want us today to think of that. I think it's a good exercise for the Christian in particular. Indeed, it's a good exercise for everyone.

Because the Christian, when he says, I love the Lord, can explore the reasons for their love for the Lord. And anybody who is not a Christian, when they are challenged as to, why do you not love the Lord?

[6:34] Well, the invitation is there for you to give reasons. To supply them if they are there. Why should a person not love the Lord?

But I was thinking in particular today of the Lord's people. When we think about what the scripture says to us, we may begin our thinking or our endeavors to answer such a question or to provide reasons from ourselves that, well, if I put it like this, I've met Christians.

And they would very much hesitate to say, I don't love the Lord. But they would very much hesitate to say it out loud that they do love him.

Why? Because they fear that they don't love him the way he ought to be loved. Or they fear that they do not love him as much as he ought to be loved.

Or they fear that the love that they have for him is not the love that he wants from them. Their fears take over and their thinking is colored by all of these fears.

[8:09] Certainly, when we think about God's love for us. Now this verse, remember, is about a believer saying, I love the Lord.

If we read the scripture, we read in the scripture that God loves. That God is a God of love.

And that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whomsoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And if we go down the road of saying, this is the way God loves, am I meant to love God in the way that he loves me?

We know if we do such a comparative study that we're going to be miserably embarrassed by our own shortcomings.

Because the love of God was so genuine, so real, so great, that there was nothing that he kept from his people that his people did not receive from his hand.

[9:27] Nothing that they needed for the salvation of their soul was kept from them, even when that encompassed the giving of his son.

So when the believer comes face to face with such a statement, maybe they feel embarrassed and shamed into thinking, well, how can my love be anything like his love for me?

Well, I want us to look at the psalm and think, first of all, about what the psalmist is to say. Because it is a declaration of love.

That's the first thing. It is a declaration of love. The second thing it is, it is an explanation, if you like, of what promotes that love.

And the third thing that I want to leave with you is this. How can I encourage that love?

[10:28] What needs to happen in order that that love that the psalmist has, that God's people have and ought to have, how can I promote it?

How can I encourage it? How can I increase it? Maybe I won't be able to answer that question. But it's a question I can leave with you in order for you to answer it for yourself.

Now the declaration is clear. I love the Lord. Maybe it's not so obvious, but many of the commentators suggest that the actual Hebrew wording of this suggests that this is a spontaneous declaration.

It's not just a declaration. It is not one that has been pre-planned or in any way stated as a consequence of deep, meaningful meditation prior to its declaration.

You know, sometimes we have to go through a logical process of assessment, if you like. And we work our way through a particular thing.

[11:51] And then at the end of it all, we come up with a conclusion. Therefore, this is what is true of me. Now there's no evidence in the psalm that says, therefore, this is what is true of me.

As if the psalmist has begun with this process and worked his way through it and ended up with this. If you read these words at the end of the psalm, maybe you could argue that.

But the actual Hebrew itself suggests this is an exclamation, a proclamation of what is true of him. I love the Lord.

And if you, if we think about it, it should be a declaration that should come from the lips of all people throughout the world.

If you remember, when God created man, we are told he created man in his own image. Adam was placed in a place where he enjoyed perfect fellowship and harmony with his creator.

[13:01] He was like him. He was in communion with him. He enjoyed fellowship with him. He loved God in the way that God loved him. There was a reciprocal love.

Of course, God is divine and his attributes are without measure and they're without boundary. Man was a creature and there was boundaries to his creaturehood.

That meant that his love was not an infinite love like God's love was infinite. But nevertheless, his experience of love was complete.

There was no lack to it. because he was like God and he was in harmony with God in his creation and in his experience of it.

So it should not be a surprise if somebody in that situation would be able to say, I love the Lord. Adam could say it without embarrassment and without shame and without any thought that what he was saying was going to be in any way tested and found to be not so.

[14:09] However, we know that Adam did not continue as God's creature perfect in all the aspects of his relationship because he sinned.

And without going into it in great detail, we know that that meant for him that his communion with God was affected.

His relationship in every aspect of it was ruined. He became someone who was an enemy of God.

He was estranged from God. He was alienated from God. And all of these things, you cannot fulfill the loving relationship that you were created in because of them.

They're no longer, it's no longer possible. But the marvel for us is when we read the psalm is that there is such a person and there are such a people and they can say, I love the Lord.

[15 : 20] Even though when sin entered into the experience of Adam, which meant that he could not say that.

In fact, he didn't want to say it. In fact, he would be embarrassed to say it. He ran from the presence of God because he could no longer say to God, I love you. He hid himself from God so that if challenged on even that one point, he knew he could not say it.

Why? Because he no longer demonstrated love by obedience to God. He disobeyed him. So, there is a marvel here before us, even at the very outset, that we can actually say I love.

C.H. Spurgeon, many years ago, composed a book and effectively there were gleanings from the writings of a man called Thomas Manton.

And in that book of gleanings, which maybe it's been reprinted and I'm not sure if it has, but when I read it anyway, the title he gave to the book was Flowers from a Puritan's Garden.

[16 : 45] And he quoted Manton as saying this, When the sun of eternal love melts the glaciers of the soul, then the rivers of affection flow.

Only a sense of divine love will ever create love to God in the heart. Only the sense of divine love will ever create love to God within the heart.

So, this declaration on the part of the psalmist is a declaration on the part of someone who is loved and who is responding to the love of God and who is recognizing, even in the declaration of love, that a change has been brought in them that God is responsible for and they themselves could not in any way lay claim to and say, Well, I'm the one who's responsible for this.

The psalmist and everyone else can say, I love you and indeed must say, I love you because of what God has done.

If you remember the Apostle John, when he wrote his epistle, in that epistle he said, of himself and he said, of the church and every other person who knows the Lord as their God, we love because he first loved us.

[18 : 41] So, that's what must be understood by this word at the beginning of this psalm. That is an expression of an understanding of God's interest in them and an understanding of reasons that they have for responding to that love by declaring that love as being theirs for him.

But you can't stop there. You have to see that the psalmist says, I love because. And, we may have a number of reasons for saying that we love the Lord.

If we look at the psalm here, he supplies in the psalm three reasons. First of all, he says, God is loved because he answers prayer.

I don't know if you see that in a psalm, but it's a statement of fact. I love the Lord because my voice and prayer she has heard and he elaborates on that.

I love the Lord because. Now, when you delve into it more particularly and you find answers to the question, what prayer exactly did he answer?

[20 : 11] what is it that you prayed for that God responded to? And the psalmist may be able to provide a number of answers, but that was a declaration anyway of the reason for his love.

The second is, I love the Lord because I have discovered this God to be a God I can trust. He is a God that I am able to trust.

Many are those who have succumbed to dishonest relationships if you like.

God is never like that. He is faithful. He is earnest. He is genuine. The third thing that the psalmist says and you can I want you to read through the psalm again for yourselves.

He is loved because he is as heavier. He is someone who has entered into the experience of his people in a redemptive way.

[21 : 18] Now maybe the psalmist because we don't know what he was thinking of he might have been thinking of of Babylon. He might have been thinking of of ill health.

He might have been thinking of the prospect of death. death. And that being put off. Certainly the psalm has that in it.

But all of these are concrete ideas that the psalmist gives to us of reasons why God's people love him. But if we are honest I suppose the Lord's people when they start exploring their own experiences experiences they may have at times or may thought may have thought especially as young Christians that God responded to their love for him.

Not the other way round because when God entered into their experience all they were able to do is interpret their experience in the light of their own limited understanding.

And their limited understanding was well I came to God and I told this God in prayer I told him that I would do this for him and that I would do that for him and that I would love him and then in response they expected God to love them in return.

[22 : 51] But it wasn't long till they understood that that cannot be the case. It's never the case as we quoted the Apostle John before we loved him because he first loved us.

Our love to him was a responsive love it was a reciprocal love it was a love that arose out of his love to us as he demonstrated it to us sometimes in a way that we could identify with love.

That's one thing that people are confused about. Sometimes God can show his love by putting his arms around us and wrapping us as it were in cotton wool and saying to you yes I'm going to love you and I'm going to love you like this and I'm going to take you to myself and I'm going to introduce you to my son and I'm going to show you what my son did for you.

And he can do that and he does do that but sometimes he can love in different ways where he takes from us and he deprives us of things and he points us to himself and say these things that you were looking for these things upon which you were depending you needed to be taken away from these things in order to discover that my love for you was everlasting.

It wasn't going to be changed by anything you did, anything you said, anywhere you went. It was a love that I showed to my own that began before you were ever created.

[24 : 32] And we have difficulty in understanding that. That there is a love of God that is eternal. And that he loved us even before the world was.

God's people need to discover that and they do through God's dealings with us.

I noticed when I was reading for this sermon that one obvious place that some people come from is this God is a God who is altogether lovely.

We see him in Christ and Christ is altogether lovely. And the more we see of Christ, the more we see of God. And the more we see of God in Christ, the more our love to him should go out regardless.

It should be there never mind the consequences, never mind the circumstances. God should be loved because he is God and that is true.

[25 : 44] Interestingly, John Murray, the theologian, says that. It is no doubt a truth that can be declared. God should be loved as God because he all his attributes that are divine.

Everything that makes him God are attractive attributes. They are things that should make us love him. Even his holiness, which is awesome.

Our God is an all-consuming fire and yet when we see him in the perfections of his divine attributes, they should draw from us a love. Whether they do or not, something else.

But the psalmist is not really coming from that place. John Murray makes this point. It is perfectly true that God ought to be loved for what he is in himself.

He should be the object of supreme love for his own inherent perfections. Yet, he says, because of our natural self-love, we cannot hate ourselves.

[27 : 06] Nor true love to God can ever be abstracted from self-love. Now, maybe that's a difficult thing to understand.

But, it is plain that every one of us has an interest in ourselves. Sometimes it is a sinful self-interest.

But at the heart of our existence is the understanding that as God's creatures, we have this desire to preserve ourselves, to put ourselves in a position where our interest becomes paramount.

But as Murray says, and as we need to understand, that natural self-love does not hold us back from coming to God and loving God because of what he means to us, as the God who has created us, the God who sustains us, the God who ministers to us as a mother ministers to her infant child, God who ministers to us as our saviour and as our preserver and governor in our lives in this world.

God, it is possible to say there is enough stimulus in God to love him as God, but we find grounds for loving him in what he means to us.

[28 : 49] If you go to the Old Testament saints and they were taught and they were instructed and they were required, we spoke about rules in the morning, at the beginning of the service, circumcised their hearts and the heart of their offspring in order to love their God with all their heart and soul.

You'd think that this need for this operation to take place would not be a necessity, yet it is.

It's not just simply a statement, love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul. He's saying circumcise their heart. In other words, this is a work of God's spirit.

This is something that God's spirit works in us. This is something that he is responsible for. The child of God understands that every element of love that is drawn out from them towards God is drawn out by God, stimulated by God, encouraged by God.

And the more we think about that, I think the more we are persuaded of it. Well, the final thing is, I suppose, the most difficult thing.

[30 : 13] How are we meant to encourage this love? You're saying, does it need encouragement? if I am a Christian, do I need to be encouraged to love the Lord?

In one sense, no. Because the child of God cannot but love his heavenly father. They are part of a filial relationship where they must love the father that begot them.

You explore the words of the apostle John. However, I don't think there is a child of God who does not understand that their relationship with God as a loving relationship, as a love that is based upon God's ministry to them through the spirit and is demonstrable by their obedience to him.

if you love me, he says, what? Shout it louder. No, he says, if you love me, fulfill my commandments.

Do my rule, fulfill my rules. Now, he's not creating a generation of Pharisees.

[31 : 42] He's not wanting us to live because, and love because, by a rule keeping, by a regulation observation, to think that we can earn our way to glory or heaven.

That's not what he is saying. The love of which he speaks is a love that creates within it even a desire for more of the same. As I said before, when God loves his people, it is with an everlasting love.

They know that their love fluctuates. They know that they go from times of a burning seal. They can't do enough for God, and at other times they're embarrassed because their love is like the love of one of the Asian churches and Christ accused them of their love going cold.

maybe you're not one of these. Maybe you don't know what it means for your love for God to go cold. But they used to tell us when we grew up as Christians that a Christian was very much like a coal sitting in the fire.

And as the coal that sat on the fire was burning with a heat and a warmth, as long as it was in the fire, that was the way it was.

[33 : 18] But if you watched it when it fell out into the hearth, as it fell out of the fire, it got cold and dark.

There was no life in it. The child of God, the Christian, the believer who says, I love the Lord, understands this and understands the implications of it.

That in order for your love for God to be maintained, in order for it to be increased, in order for it to be continued, well, in the first instance, it's God's love for you that's important.

And because he loves, you are safe. Because he loves, you will not be lost, because he loves, his love will never diminish or alter or change.

But your experience of that love will change if you place distance between you and him, if you place distance between you and his people, if you place distance between you and his word.

[34 : 31] Your experience of that love will alter. You will expose yourself to the condemnation of God which he administers through the hiding of his face and the various other experiences that the child of God may have to encounter from time to time.

We've all experienced the cooling of her ardor, but the only way to constancy is by a closer walk with himself. to remember which one of the hymn writers has these words, Oh, for a closer walk with God.

Why? Because the very man knew whoever it was that this was what was needed in order to prove or to prove to himself even that what he had was genuine and what he had was lasting.

Can you say today, I love the Lord? When you put the word because after it, where does it take you?

I love the Lord because he once came into my life a long time ago, but so long ago I can't hardly remember what it was like.

[35 : 58] well, it's good if you can say that, if you can actually go back to a time in your life when you came to know the Lord.

It's good. But if all you have is dim, distant memories from the past, well, I think there's a challenge there for you, for each of us.

we can't dwell on memories, we can't dwell on past experiences. There's no point in any one of us saying, well, I once told this woman or this man, I love you, because I don't think that relationship will last very long if you don't demonstrate it, if you don't declare it, if you don't do it spontaneously and don't go on doing it.

Why should the Lord be any different? In fact, our Lord is our example for any love that we have. And may each of us remember that.

May he press to us these few thoughts. Let us pray.