

The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] Psalm 116. I could find no discernible structure to this psalm. And I'm very glad for that fact.

One of the first things you do if you're preparing a message or exegeting something is you look for structure. What's the flow of the argument? How does it sort of break up? I couldn't find it.

And I'm really glad about that because I don't think there is one. And if there was a structure, I'd have to sort of dissect it and pull it apart and look for an argument.

And I think if I did that, I'd lose the heart, the heart of this passage. Because it's just, it's beautiful. Like it's just a really beautiful passage.

I remember a friend of mine. And he wrote his girlfriend this love letter. And she said, oh, thank you. And returned it to him. And she'd made corrections to it.

[1 : 09] You know, like she'd corrected his grammar and his spelling. And I remember him telling me about this one day. And he was just so hurt that she would do such violence to this really heartfelt message.

And so I'm really glad I couldn't find any discernible structure here. Because it doesn't lend itself to sort of clinical dissection. So what I want to do is not a typical sermon.

I really, I just want to make some observations on what I think is a very tender prayer. I love the Lord.

Excuse me, I found it really hard when I was studying it to actually even get past the first passage, you know. I love the Lord because he heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

I love the Lord because he heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. I love the Lord.

[2 : 19] I want to be this guy. Like the person that when they pray, this is the first thing that comes out of their mouth.

I love the Lord. But it isn't the first thing that comes out of my mouth always. Because I don't always love the Lord as I should.

I love financial security. And I love vocational success. And I love being able to afford things.

So sometimes those are the first things that I pray about. I think God sometimes brings or allows affliction in our lives so that we would stop loving everything else in the way that we should only love God.

And I suspect this is what happened in this psalm. That this person, this man or this woman, the psalmist had a major drama in their life.

[3 : 33] And they were reoriented to God in this wonderful way. It's a prayer of thanksgiving for the goodness of God.

For God intervening in some miraculous way that we don't really know about. But clearly the situation that this person found himself in before they wrote this psalm was terrible.

It was horrendous. One version says, The cords of death entangled me. Another says, The walls of hell were closing in on me.

Verse 3. That's kind of serious stuff. This is probably a good opportunity just to recap last week's sermon. Or one of the points from last week's sermon. And that is this, that Christianity is not an escapist religion.

It is not an opiate. It is not a drug for the people. The psalm's a model of faith which insists that the world must be experienced as it really is.

[4 : 37] And not in some pretended way. If it feels like the walls of hell are closing in on you, then you should pray to God about that. You must tell God that's how you're feeling.

And we see this kind of honesty in this passage in verse 10. You know, I am greatly afflicted. Again, we don't really know what was going on.

But clearly, something very personal. It wasn't a general affliction. It was a very personal one to this person here.

The personal pronoun, I and my, used over 30 times in the passage. It's all I, I, I, I, my, my, my. And there's this really beautiful moment in verse 8 and 9, which is not so obvious on a first read.

Verse 8 and 9. Let me read it from the NIV here. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my heart from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

[5 : 45] The writer here is quoting Psalm 56. Verse 13. Now listen to verse 13 here of Psalm 56.

Because our guy adds something. Listen to Psalm 56. For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

So what does our writer here add to his version? What does he add to it? Let me read it again.

Verse 8. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears.

You've delivered my eyes from tears. When I first saw this, I was reminded of a friend of mine who, back in New Zealand, who married very young and his wife left him sort of within about six months for somebody else.

And it was just a horrible, horrible situation. And I remember him telling me that he cried for two weeks, solid. And crying became his, that just became his existence.

[7 : 02] He just cried continuously. And so I remember him telling me, like going to a supermarket and buying food. And he's, you know, at the cashier. And he's just weeping, weeping, weeping.

And the lady says, are you okay? Oh yeah, I'm fine. No problem. Bagged potatoes, thanks. You know, and he's weeping. It just became such a part of his life he didn't even know he was doing it.

The Lord has delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears.

Now all that to say, whoever this person was, they were having a pretty rough time. But the trajectory of the passage is not, my life really stinks, God, where are you?

The trajectory of this passage is, God has rescued me. Thank you. Thank you, God. Thank you, Father.

I am moving towards you more. I'm continuing on the path of faith. We see this in verse 2. Because you turned, because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

[8 : 10] Verse 13. I will lift up the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord. It's a great image, eh?

That cup of salvation. He's, he's, he or she, they're, it's a physical thing, eh? Like they're grabbing this cup. God, you've been so good to me. Thank you.

This thing you've given me, salvation. I'm grabbing a hold of it. I'm taking a hold of it. And I'm running with it. I'm moving forward in faith.

Again in verse 17. I will sacrifice a thank offering and call upon the name of the Lord. I want you to hear the emotion in this psalm.

The psalmist is incredibly overwhelmed with thankfulness and gratitude. What is this thankfulness? What does thankfulness look like in this psalm?

[9 : 17] Well, we can see from this, thankfulness is not just being polite to God. Like when you're a kid and you'd visit your mother's, you'd visit like a friend's house and your mum would come to pick you up and you always had to say that line to the people's house you're visiting.

Do you guys know what that line is? Thanks for having me. Thanks for, thanks for having me. Oh, thanks for having me. You know. Being thankful to God is not being polite to God.

It is not something that we should do, you know, we shouldn't just tack it onto our prayers, you know, tick the box. It shouldn't be part of your five-step kind of strategy for prayer. I would hate it if at the end of the sermon you thought, yep, Psalm 116, that's a good one.

It's a good example of, it's a good reminder that I should be thankful and I'll work hard at doing that. I'd hate it if that's what you got. You know, we do, we must remember to be thankful, but when I read this, it's from this God, it's coming from here, you know.

It's coming from his heart. Deep within him. Listen to these verses from Psalm 116, right? Do they sound like somebody who was just trying to tick some boxes?

[10 : 42] Who thinks that thankfulness is a good idea and I must remember to do it? Does it sound like that? Does it sound like he's thinking, yeah, this is a good prayer strategy?

Listen to these verses. I love the Lord. He heard my cry. I will call on him as long as I live. I called on the name of the Lord. Oh, Lord, save me.

Our God is full of compassion. He protects the simple hearted. When I was in great need, he saved me. For you, O Lord, have delivered my eyes from tears.

I believed. Verse 12, how can I repay the Lord? How can I, what shall I render to the Lord? Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints.

Oh, Lord, truly I am your servant. Praise the Lord. These are not the words of someone who is trying to make sure they're praying the right things. They're the words of someone who loves God.

[11:49] And he loves God because God demonstrated his love to this person. He loves God because God loved him first. And there's a great passage about that in Romans 5.

Romans 5, verse 6. You see, just at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we're still sinners, Christ died for us.

Yet, we are imperfect responders to God's love.

God loves us dearly. And we don't respond perfectly. And this guy talks about this, you know. In verse 12.

[12:55] What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? How can I repay the Lord? And yet, even from that sin, we are rescued from. I'm going to wrap up the sermon now.

It's been very short. I know that. But it's been a tough one to write. Because there's so much good stuff I wanted to talk about.

So much clever, exegetical stuff. Like really interesting things. Which, you know, may have added to it. I don't know. But let me tell you a few just to show that I actually did some work on this.

Paul quotes this psalm in 2 Corinthians 4. He quotes it. And it's interesting because he quotes this psalm. And it's in a part of Corinthians where, right as Paul is talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And what's interesting about that is if you read this with Jesus' eyes, Psalm 116. There is a lot of stuff about death and rescue in there. That's quite interesting.

[13:59] Another thing that's interesting is the only command in this passage is verse 7. Return, O my soul, to your rest. For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

Or return, O my soul, to your rest. God has been good. It's the only command. Return. Return, Hebrew word shav, means repent. The only command in this is repent.

The whole thing. Repent, why? Because God's been good to you. That's quite interesting, I think. It's interesting that call upon the name of the Lord is said four times.

That's the only structural thing I could find that sort of links it together. And what's interesting is in Acts 2, that's actually the definition of a Christian. Those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

So there's tons of interesting stuff, but I wanted to avoid the interesting stuff because I wanted just to get to one thing. I wanted you to understand one thing. And I've already said it's this, that what I want you to get from Psalm 116, what I think it's telling us, it's not a prayer strategy.

[15:05] Is I wanted you to be exposed to the tenderness of this passage. This guy who was wonderfully rescued.

And we get this beautiful window into his emotions. And this beautiful window into his commitment to going on in his faith.

And my hope is that as we read this, as you get it into your heart, your own rescue, your own salvation will be reawakened.

But your heart is moved by this passage. Moved to consider some questions. Do you really comprehend your rescue and what that means?

Or has it been robbed from you? By more pressing everyday issues. Do you love God?

[16:20] Do you love God? It might be a stumbling love, but do you love Him? Salvation is much more than getting forgiven and us getting to go to heaven.

Salvation means that we can come before the face of God. We can meet the Father. We can love God.

We can know His love. That's what salvation is about. Do you love God? Are you thankful?

Are you thankful for this stuff? Would you allow God to reorient your heart this evening? Let me finish with a prayer.

And then Susie Lay will come up and pray with us. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father. Father.

[17 : 40] Father. We love you. Help us to love you. Help us to get not just our heads around good doctrine, Lord.

But help us to get our heart wrapped around your sacrifice, Lord. Help our hearts to understand that you loved us so much that you would rather die than be without us.

Help us to love you more than anything else in the world. Help us to love you more than anything else in the world. Help us to love you more than anything else in the world. Lord. Holy Spirit. Get into our hearts.

Dig around in there. The things that we put up in front of us that we love more than you. Lord, bring us to repentance, Father.

We love you, Father. Help us to love you.

[19 : 14] In Jesus' name. Amen.