

The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

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Date: 20 June 2010

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's great hearing that offering hymn sung with such exuberance and with such feeling.

It's very inspiring to hear that. And really that's the way Psalm 116 is meant to be sung and prayed with that kind of great passion and exuberance.

I want to welcome you back to the series on the Psalms. This is our third part. And if you would like to, please turn to the green sheet that was in your bulletin.

And we're going to be looking at that. And you'll see from that that there's questions and exercises at the bottom because we really want this to be an interactive series on the Psalms to encourage you to pray, perhaps in ways that you haven't before, and to allow the Psalms to shape your prayers.

We're going to be looking at a total of eight different kinds of prayers in the Psalms and in the eight sermons in this series. Many of the Psalms fall into the categories of the first three sermons.

[1 : 1 2] And those sermons really have a rhythm to them, those prayers I should say. Because the first type was one of hymn and a hymn of praise and joy.

And if you remember Psalm 146, it was a hymn that called people to praise God because of who he is. And to trust him because he is able to save.

And he is willing to save as well. When the Israelites were in a harmonious relationship with God in their particular circumstances, it was this kind of hymn that they would sing.

It was like a song of orientation towards God. A second type of prayer was the song of lament that we heard last week. And this is a prayer when God seems distant and the worshippers experiencing distress.

And the Psalms is able to pour that out to God, knowing that this is part of his prayer, part of his relationship to God. And there's confidence in Psalm 28 that God hears those prayers, those pleas for mercy.

[2 : 2 4] And the third type of Psalm is a song of thanksgiving. And these are Psalms of great and deep thanks because God heard that lament and answered it.

They are Psalms that express great praise because the psalmist has been restored to wholeness. And there's thanksgiving and joy. Very much like a hymn of praise, the difference is that the hymn of thanksgiving, talks to God about the specific way that God has rescued or delivered this person.

These are songs of reorientation, back to God. And I like those three terms, orientation, disorientation, and reorientation, because when we pray, we are being brought into the right orientation.

God is central in our lives. Our relationship with him is everything. We know his love. I think it's wonderful we're doing this psalm on Father's Day.

Before the 9 o'clock service, I talked with a girl, 5 years old, who was very excited about a party she was planning for her dad in the afternoon and buying all the different things, the big balloons.

[3 : 44] And when she was talking about it, she was very excited, and there was this sense that she really loved her dad. It was a wonderful thing to talk to her about. And I thought when I was talking to her that that love she has for her dad is so strong because the love of her father is strong for her as well.

And in fact, it came first. And that's why Father's Day is so appropriate here, because when we come to God in prayer, the first thing we say is, Our Father.

And that is a way to begin that orients our life to God. We say it because Jesus has forgiven us. And it means everything to us. It makes sense of our life.

He is our hope, our joy, and our goal. Everything good comes from the hand of our Heavenly Father. And Psalm 116 starts by expressing that central relationship in our life.

I love the Lord, he says. And that is what this psalm is about. I love the Lord. Now, lots of times you have probably heard people say the God of the Old Testament is the God of justice, judgment.

[5 : 01] And the God of the New Testament is the God of love. But if you say that, you can't have read the psalms, because the psalms are full of heartfelt love expressed to God, for God.

And in these psalms, love for God is not a duty. It's not just something that they are meant to do, although that is true. It is a joy. It is a reality.

It flows out of the love that God has for them. Just as this little girl's love for her dad, I'm sure flowed out of the love that he has for her.

And you see this in verse 1. God's great love for this writer moves him to love God in response. So he says, I love the Lord. Why? Because he has heard my voice, my pleas for mercy.

In other words, it's because I can talk to a God who hears, that I have been brought into that relationship, that I can even do that, that I love God.

[6 : 03] The living God who brought this psalmist into a relationship with him in the covenant, hears him in his distress. When God seemed most distant, he hears the prayer's voice.

And he says, because of it, I love the Lord. He has loved me first. Now, as Christians, this should sound very familiar to us.

1 John, in his first letter, John says to us, chapter 4, In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

And then he goes on to say, in verse 19, we love, because God first loved us. And this is what the psalm is pointing towards.

We should think of the gift of Jesus to us as we look at this psalm. We love and give thanks to God, because he has first loved us in Jesus. Jesus has rescued us.

[7 : 03] He has opened the door to heaven, by his death on the cross. And by his resurrection, he has brought us into fellowship with God forever.

And we know him as our risen Lord. It's a rescue to eternal life. And we always give thanks to God for this gift. It is an eternal reality. That's why gratitude is central to our lives as followers of Jesus.

And that's why Psalm 116 brings us into the gospel. It is a public testimony of God's saving work, and a response of joy and gratitude.

Now, the wonderful thing about these psalms of thanksgiving is that the psalmist, as I said, experiences personally what we talked about in Psalm 146.

He is able to save this particular person. He is willing to save this particular person because he is the God who keeps his promises to his people.

[8 : 05] And so listen to the testimony. It starts in verse 3. He says, he describes this anguish very, very graphically. The snares of death encompassed me.

The pangs of Sheol, which is the shadowy land of the dead, where the dead live, he said, that laid hold on me, and I suffered distress and anguish.

And he is saying literally that the grip of death was tightening around him and surrounding him. And we don't know exactly what that suffering was. It may have been a very serious illness that brought him very close to death.

Or it may have been that he was depressed by betrayal or loss in his relationships. Or it could have been that people were trying to kill him, that were surrounding him.

But in any case, we know that it involved great personal danger. And he was emotionally devastated by that. You see that in verses 10 and 12, where he says, I believed even when I spoke, I am greatly afflicted.

[9 : 12] I am pressed down, he is saying here. And then in verse 11, I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars. In other words, there is a vain hope in people.

I can't receive help from anyone. There is no one there for me. He is expressing what this anguish is like for him emotionally. And in that dark time, when he seemed most forsaken by God, that was the occasion that he called on the name of the Lord.

And verse 4 is this turning point in his life. He says, Then at that time of greatest darkness, I called on the name of the Lord. O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul.

And the thing that's so personal about this is this psalmist doesn't just say, I prayed to God when things were really bad. He actually says what the words of that prayer are.

Deliver my soul, Lord. Deliver my soul. And the reason he's able to say those words so clearly is because he said them over and over again. It was very unlikely.

[10 : 19] It was just a one-time prayer. It was a prayer that he came to God in his distress over a long period of time. And we don't know how God answered those prayers, but we know that he did in a very, very powerful way.

And we know that it was in a way that transformed him. Because of verses 5 through 9, the psalmist suddenly bursts into praise after saying, I called on the Lord.

And he doesn't stop until the end of verse 9. Many things about God that he had heard, that he had probably said before, he now knew in his heart.

It was a reality for him in his life. So in verse 5, God's grace became real to him and powerful. God's righteousness, his right judgments were real for him.

And he experienced God's mercy in tangible acts of love for him. And then in verse 6, he understands that God preserves the simple because he felt like a child who was helpless, who could not even live his own life out.

[11 : 27] He had seen God save him when he was brought low. And then if you look at verse 7, he looks back and he says, the Lord, when I think of what has happened, has dealt bountifully with me.

So much so that his soul, he talks to his soul and says, you can go from the place of anxiety now, and as it says in verse 7, return to your rest.

To the place of being at peace with God and with the world around him as well. There's a powerful rescue that takes place for him personally. And the amazing thing is that these verses show us that it is through this terrible time in his life, this suffering, that the wonderful attributes of God became real in his life.

It's because he prayed to God in his distress that he is able to praise God so joyfully and with such a clear reason as well. It's why he can say, I love the Lord.

It is because God rescued him. God has given him the gift of knowing his goodness through that terrible time, so much so that when he looks back at his ordeal, they become the occasion for him to thank God and to love him.

[12 : 47] That's how powerful God's work is. It transforms that awful situation that he was in for good purpose. And he calls other people to see that as well, to see God's power even over the deepest evil in our lives.

And I want you to notice verse 8 because there, the goodness of God runs deep into the psalmist's life in very personal ways. He talks to God directly there. He turns to saying, you God, for you.

And you can hear the gratitude as he says it. He says, you have delivered my soul from death. In other words, you have brought me life where there was only death.

There is this transformation in my life. And not only that, but you have delivered my eyes from tears. You have brought deep comfort into my grief. The reason for my pain, you have dealt with and you have brought me true, lasting comfort.

And then finally he says, you have delivered my feet from stumbling. You have kept me from wandering and falling away from God. And you have carried me and supported me through this time of darkness.

[14 : 00] Your goodness has come deep into my life. And then he, in verse 9, he switches back to speaking to all of us again and he said, here's the result of God's incredible work in my life.

He says, I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. That's an important verse for us because it teaches us what the whole Old Testament teaches.

And that is that God, who is the God of rescue, doesn't just deliver us for the sake of our survival. He rescues us so that we might worship him, so that we might thank him and serve him and take joy in our relationship with him.

I mean, that's what happened when the Israelites were taken from a slavery out of Egypt. The reason, so that they could worship God. It's the same thing for this psalmist as well.

To walk in his light, to live for him, is what it means to walk before the Lord. It means to worship him with your life. And when I read this, I was reminded, and I don't know if you were here for this, but a year ago, Paul Phibbs gave a testimony to the congregation.

[15 : 10] And in his testimony, he wore this suit that he was supposed to be buried in. It's a remarkable testimony because he had a very lengthy, serious illness and almost died.

And I was there visiting him a couple of times when I thought, you know, it could be any hour that he would die. But God raised him up, healed him.

Many people called on the name of the Lord at that time. And in his terrible ordeal, Paul saw the amazing goodness of the Lord. And this is what he testified to in front of the congregation.

This is what he gave thanks to God for. Very much, he was reenacting what Psalm 116 is all about. Now, what many of you may not know is that shortly after this, Paul deeply blessed our dear brother, Harold Linnington, who is now with the Lord.

Harold became very sick with the same kind of illness that Paul had. And Paul was good friends with Harold and visited him throughout his illness right until he died.

[16 : 17] And in their visits, he read the Bible, they prayed together frequently, and Paul could say things that strengthened and encouraged Harold in the Lord only because he had been through the same exact kind of illness as well.

He could bless Harold in ways that no one else could. Paul was God's gift and minister to Harold during that time of illness, and that is part of what it looks like for Paul to walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

That's God's purpose for rescue, that we might worship him and serve him with thanksgiving. And that's why Psalm 116 very naturally flows into fervent gratitude from verse 12 right to the end of the psalm.

God has rescued the psalmist, we have heard that. He has revealed his goodness to him in very personal ways. And now, in this third part, the psalmist overflows with thanksgiving.

And he says this, it's a wonderful question in verse 12. He says, what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

[17 : 26] And that is the gospel question. He is saying, I want to repay God, but it is impossible. If we understand the good news, this is our question all the time, every day.

What can I possibly give to Jesus to repay him for all his benefits to me? It is a joyful question. It is a thankful question. It is a question of worship.

And he answers that question in what seems like a strange way at first, in verse 13. He says, I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.

But you see, what he is saying here, he says, all I can do is glorify God for his saving work. All I can do is raise up his cup of salvation and every day turn to him for his leading and continued saving work.

These are the vows, by the way, that you see three times. He says, he pays in the presence of all God's people. Verse 14 and 17. They are the vows that were first made in verse 2, where he said, because God saved me, I will call on him as long as I live.

[18 : 38] So he said, all I can do is receive that cup and drink from it and call upon his name every day as long as I live. And that's the call to you and I as well.

Because in a far deeper way, Jesus has filled your cup of salvation. And all we can do is to take it by faith and make it our own and drink from it.

Then with joyful hearts, all we can, the way that we respond, the way we overflow is to worship, to glorify the gracious one who's filled our cup.

And that is why we close with verses 15 and 16. There's the joyful expression of the life of worship. Here's what the only real response, the loving response to God can be.

And that is to serve him with a glad heart. I want you to look at those verses because verse 15 begins with a revelation of God's immense love.

[19 : 37] Here's the root of his worship. And he says this in verse 15. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

And literally, he is saying that the death of any of God's people is costly to God. It costs him dearly. Clearly what's happened here is this psalmist is stunned by the magnitude of God's love for him in saving him.

And he is telling us that God loves each of his people so deeply that there is an incredible loss in God when any of his people die. And you see this when Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus.

Lazarus, there is a sense of deep grief and loss in God. And of course, that cost is perfectly revealed to us in Jesus because in Jesus we see that the death of his saints, of each of us, costs him his own son so that he could overturn the power of death and bring us eternal life.

This is how precious we are to God. In his own rescue from death, the psalm begins to see the depth of God's love long before Christ that would one day be revealed on the cross.

[20 : 59] And this love is what moves him to say verse 16 as a prayer. He says this, O Lord, I am your servant. I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.

You have loosed my bonds. Well, that is the prayer of a worshipping Christian because Jesus has freed us in his deep love and he has freed us so that with all our hearts we want to serve him.

It is our joy to give thanks to him. I don't know if you noticed this but in the morning prayer service there's the general thanksgiving. And they must have taken it right from Psalm 116.

Because we pray in that thanksgiving we beseech thee God to give us that due sense of all thy mercies that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful and that we show forth thy praise not only with our lips but in our lives by giving up ourselves to thy service.

That is verse 16. When you call on him you call on him not only to rescue you not only to give you your needs but to help you to be his servant in your family at work at church here in your relationships with the city this is the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

[22 : 21] It's not always convenient but it is always joyful. It is an expression of thanksgiving for deep love of God has for you. It is not a thanksgiving in words only.

It is the thanksgiving that is lived out as a free servant of Jesus Christ. So I want to close our sermon very very practically and ask the question how does this shape your prayer life and my prayer life?

And I want to say three brief things. The first thing it shows us is that all of us have been rescued by Jesus from spiritual death in a far more extensive way than the psalmist was rescued.

That is our gift. Our prayers should be filled with thanks because of all Jesus has done for us. This psalm helps bring our own rescue into our hearts and into our minds and gives us words to express our thanks to God for his rescue.

And this ought to be a theme in all our prayers. Understanding of the rescue. Thanking God for it. Secondly, this psalm shapes our prayer life because the testifying to others of God's gracious work in our lives is actually part of our prayers.

[23 : 39] It is a public prayer. Now we know from looking at this psalm that 116 is an intensely personal psalm. He describes here suffering that is unique to him.

He describes the joy of being healed and saved. And it brings us to reflect on our own personal lives. How has God rescued you? How has Jesus come into your life in very practical ways and delivered you or comforted you or led you in your anxiety?

How has God done this? But the psalmist also writes this psalm to be said in the presence of all God's people. It's a public testimony of God's work in his life.

So that when you share what Jesus has done in your life whether it's in your Bible study group or with a friend who doesn't know Jesus you are praying. You are praying publicly and there is a deep encouragement and faith that comes from it.

It is as though the embers and the coals of your own faith is firing up the faith of the people who hear you pray in that way. And it's simple conversations a testimony of God's work in your life.

[24 : 50] And finally what this psalm shapes our prayer life like is that it brings home to us our great motivation to pray. And that very simply is our great motivation to pray is that God loves us beyond anything we can imagine or expect.

Our life and death are so precious to God that it cost his son. So that every time we pray we are loving God. It is a response to his deep love for us in Jesus Christ.

This is what moves us to pray. This is what strengthens us and gives us joy in our times of prayer. So these are just three ways your prayers are shaped by 116. You will find even more if you read this psalm every day.

And if you want to follow the exercises that are on the green sheet as well. And you will find your prayers shaped by this wonderful psalm 116. May God give you grace by his Holy Spirit to know his goodness to you and to move you to pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.