

Thanksgiving service

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again just for a very short time to the Psalm 116 and reading at verse 12.

Psalm 116 and at verse 12, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? As we're aware, it's a Thanksgiving evening, and Thanksgiving is a very, very important part of our Christian calendar.

Indeed, it shouldn't just be Thanksgiving on one particular day or one particular evening. There should be Thanksgiving, should really be part and partial of our Christian lives.

Because when we stop and we think about it, we have so, so much to be thankful for. Now, this Psalm, as we can see, while the latter part is, as it were, bursting forth with Thanksgiving and praise and indebtedness to God, we also see that it's a psalm in the earlier part where the psalmist has been struggling with real problems, with real difficulties.

In fact, he's been overcome and he's been overwhelmed. And, you know, that's really life, isn't it? That we so often find ourselves, on the one hand, sometimes life is going so smoothly and everything is going so well.

[1 : 37] And there are times when it's like that, that we do stop and we reflect and we say, well, really, God is good to me. And then there are other times we're overwhelmed with difficulties and with problems and with issues and with sorrows.

And it's very easy to lose sight of God's dealings and to lose our way. But when we come to this psalm, we find that the psalmist, even in the sorrows, in the pain, in the difficulties, even when he feels that he's at the very end of himself, despite everything, praise is still part and partial of his being.

Now, it's a psalm that I think we all love, a psalm we're familiar with, and particularly the opening words of the psalm are words that we so often use ourselves.

I love the Lord. And here we have it, I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. And the psalmist, obviously, was in a place and in a condition.

In fact, he tells us later on in the psalm, in verse 3, the snares of death encompassed me, the pangs of shoal or the grave laid hold on me.

[3 : 00] I suffered distress and anguish. I don't know exactly what was happening, what the circumstances of this psalm were, but it was a psalm where he was threatened by people all around.

And even in verse 11, I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars. So in all probability, it could have been illness, it could have been overwhelmed with various mysterious providences, but it would almost appear that there was human involvement in it as well.

But one of the things the psalmist is so giving thanks for is that the Lord heard him. That's what it says, I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy because he inclined his ear to me.

And that's got the idea of when you're putting your ear down to somebody in order to really listen. And I'm sure you and I know that it's one of the most, I suppose, annoying or frustrating or disappointing things.

If there's something really troubling you, and maybe there's pain in your heart, and you're trying to tell somebody how you feel, you're trying to tell somebody what's happening, and you can see in their eyes that they're not in the slightest interested.

[4 : 36] They're switched off. They're not paying attention. And that really, really hurts because you know in your own heart that this is something that's causing you so much pain and so much heartache, and yet they're not listening, they're not caring, they're not paying attention.

And so we have here the psalmist is saying, Ah, well, this is different. Here is the Lord, and in my pain and in my distress and in my actions, even though there's nobody else around that I can talk to.

And that would be an awful situation. Can you imagine what it would be like if you had nobody that you could talk to? Maybe, for all I know, there might be some of you in here, and that's exactly where you are.

You feel that in the situation and condition that you are in just now, nobody else understands you. But there is one that does.

And that's, I think, where the psalmist came to on this occasion. Because as he even hints, as we said there in verse 11, he says, I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars.

[5 : 55] He found that there was nobody really that he could trust. But he knew there was one. There was one who had inclined his ear. Who had, as it were, put down his ear deliberately with attention, with compassion.

Wanted saying, right, I'm listening. And that's the most wonderful privilege that we have. That tonight we can go to the Lord.

It doesn't matter what's in our heart. It doesn't matter what's in our life. And we're able to go to him. And we know that he's going to listen. Because I love the Lord.

Because he has heard my voice. And in fact, the very language here would indicate, because I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice.

It's as if the psalmist is saying here, because he has heard it once, he's going to go on hearing it again and again and again. There's a tremendous, there's a sense of confidence and assurance coming out of this.

[7 : 04] Where he says, I love the Lord because he has heard my voice. And the very language is indicating he's heard it and he will hear it again and again and again. Because he has inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

I hope we have that assurance as well. And that that is how you are saying tonight. That as long as I live, I will call upon the Lord.

I will call upon the name of the Lord. So often we find the psalmist saying that. I will call on the name of the Lord. And we find actually there where it says to us, verse 4, then I called on the name of the Lord.

We've mentioned several times calling on the name of the Lord. And it tells us that the Lord is gracious and righteous and merciful. Isn't that wonderful?

Tonight we go to our Lord who is gracious. Full of grace. He is gracious in order to, you know, when you think of what we are and what we deserve.

[8 : 14] And God would be completely right in his being and he would take glory to his name in casting us off. Because all that he does, now this is strange and mysterious to us, but even in casting away into the lostness of hell brings glory to his name.

We can't understand that. That is a mystery to us. But everything that God does brings glory to his name. And so, at one level, in the removal of his off from this earth, he would be right in it.

But he's gracious. And he's going to take what glory he's taking to his name through being gracious to us. And we will discover through his grace and through his mercy aspects of his glory that it would be impossible for us to ever comprehend or understand were it not for sin.

Even, although Adam enjoyed at the very beginning, although he enjoyed the perfection of a walk with God, he couldn't understand in the way that the redeemed of glory can understand the mercy and the grace and the love of God as all that has been discovered in Jesus Christ.

So the Lord is gracious and righteous. You see, he's right in all his dealings. Again, we don't understand that. But the Lord is incapable of ever erring one degree to the right or one degree to the left.

[9 : 58] All his dealings are righteous because he is utterly right and just in the entirety of his being. And so his dealings are in righteousness and his dealings are in mercy.

And so the psalmist is so aware of all this. Now, I don't know whether it's a personal psalm, but it says, gracious is the Lord and righteous. Our God is merciful.

You see, this is an incredibly personal psalm because the word I or me or my, it's round about 30 times or so.

There's an incredible usage of the personal there. I, me, mine. But on this occasion, he has the our God and whether this is a psalm that is being sung by way like of testimony.

Many people think that this is how it is, that the psalmist, of course, singing this to the covenant people of God, knowing that this would be part of the worship of God in the temple throughout the centuries.

[11:10] And in all probability, it is like by way of testimony. testimony. So despite all the pain and all the suffering and all the sorrows and all the alarm that he's going through and discovering that all mankind are liars, that's one of the things the psalmist discovered, that every person has the potential for letting down.

You and I have the potential for letting each other down. Probably the greatest and most difficult discovery is the discovery of the potential that we have of letting ourselves down.

It's there. All men are liars. But then he turns round and he says, as he reflects upon all God's goodness and all that the Lord has done, what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? And I think that's something that we must take to ourselves and we must ask ourselves the same things. What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

And when you think of even just where we are, God in his providence where he has set us in this part of the land, tonight this is our night of thanksgiving.

[12:30] It is where we, where we are here in Stornow, we draw near to God in worship and in praise and in thanksgiving. And we have to think, I know we're part of a great world, but we're looking, as it were, at where we are.

And when you think of where the Lord has placed us, because we do have seed time and we do have harvest time, the Lord has promised that in this world. It doesn't mean that every particular area of this world will every year have a seed time and a harvest time.

We know full well that there are places in this world and sometimes they don't get a harvest, sometimes through incredible drought, or sometimes the reverse through incredible flooding, that there is the destruction of crops or there is the inability for anything to grow.

Sometimes that happens in parts of this world. We see these pictures come every so often. The extremes. We often grumble where we are.

We grumble about our remoteness, we grumble about our weather, we grumble about our prices, we grumble about a host of things. But you know, when we strip it all down, we probably are in as good a place as is possible in this world.

[13:53] Yes, as I say, there are many things that we grumble over and we sometimes say, oh, I wish we had this and I wish we had that. But when you think, when we stop to consider, and that's one of the good things that a Thanksgiving night does, it forces us to stop and to reflect and to think on what we have and where we are.

And when we think of God's goodness to us, you know, with our homes and with the comforts that we have, with the clothes that we have, we have, I know that we're living in a world where there are increased difficulties difficulties and where it's becoming harder and harder for many.

But yet, despite all that, we have to stop and reflect and marvel at God's goodness to us. And so, it's very easy for us to take everything for granted and not to give the Lord thanks for what we have. And again, when you think of the spiritual good things that the Lord has given to us, he has set us in a place where there is a spiritual heritage. We have been brought up with a Christian heritage. A lot of people, even in this land, have not. But we have that privilege. And it's humbling. It's not for one moment have we the right for us to have any sense of superiority, not for one moment.

[15:27] In fact, it is something that should humble us. That we have been brought, we are living at a particular time where there is still Christian influence within this community.

And we have a Christian heritage. And these things are wonderful things that we ought to give thanks to God for. We should never stop reflecting upon what we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And if you tonight as a believer, remember what the Bible says to us about this gospel, about this salvation, it terms the salvation in Jesus Christ as an unspeakable gift.

An unspeakable gift. It is so wonderful, so incredible. If tonight Jesus Christ is your Lord and your Savior, you should never stop praising and thanking God for his goodness and his mercy to you. because you see, becoming a Christian is not something that you can achieve on your own. It's not something that you work up by yourself. It's not something that you received by birth.

[16 : 38] It's not something that was given to you by another person. It is not something that you earned by your good works. It is just this. It is an unspeakable gift.

It is God's great gift to you. Supposing somebody were to come tonight and come with a great big bag full of a hundred thousand pounds and put it there, yes, you'd be overwhelmed and you'd be saying, oh, that's wonderful, and you could be beginning to think of the things that you could do and whatever with it.

That's nothing, absolutely nothing, compared to this unspeakable gift. Because when you think about it, think about the cost, think of God's love from all eternity, he loved you.

And because of that love, that everlasting love, he sent a son into this world to die for you. So that when Jesus was on the cross, he was dying for you.

He tasted death for every man, personally, individually, your death, my death, upon him. So we must never ever tire of reflecting and thinking and thanking God for this unspeakable gift.

[18 : 00] And that's what we've received in Jesus Christ. And that's what we find here in the next verse.

What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. Now, the cup of salvation could refer to the drink offering in the temple worship, but it has often been suggested the cup of salvation here is talking about the whole scheme of salvation.

And the whole idea, like even in Psalm 23, of my cup overflowing. and the whole idea here is of, as it were, coming to the temple, lifting up, lifting up this salvation, lifting up, testifying to this salvation. Because that's what we've been given this salvation for. It is to tell others. It is to share with others. I will lift up the cup of salvation.

Salvation is not something we're to hide away. We're not to hide, Jesus said that, we're not to hide our light under something. It is there to be displayed.

[19 : 15] We're to be proud of it, to glory in it. Not in a way where we're taking any pride, but where we're seeking to glorify God by living this salvation, by lifting up, as it were, this salvation.

And so we find that the psalmist is here filled with a heart that is overflowing. I will lift up the cup of salvation. You see, there's no end to the reasons for giving God thanks.

We've quoted often enough before the little chorus that children sing, count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will amaze you or surprise you what the Lord has done.

And you know, there is so much in that. If tonight, as an exercise, if you were to sit down with a sheet of paper, a pen and paper, and honestly begin to work through, write down every blessing in providence and in grace that is yours, I guarantee you, you'd soon be getting up for another sheet of paper, and another sheet of paper, and another sheet of paper.

Because if we actually sat down and began to count all our blessings, it would amaze us, it would surprise us at all that the Lord has done.

[20 : 54] And it is because the psalmist was obviously doing that and reflecting upon that he is saying what shall I render to the Lord? And then he is saying I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Now it is very obvious that the psalmist in his distress, and we often found that in the Old Testament times, that when they were in real times of distress, that they would make a vow, a promise before God that often if God would deliver them, that they would do such and such a thing.

Now I have no idea what the psalmist may have vowed, but he's very conscious that whatever it was, he is now going to publicly perform that and to do that knowing that God is a faithful God and so he's coming to do that.

Now there are many things that we could say, what shall I render to the Lord? God. And I think if we go to verse 17, we see one of the things, I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving. I think when you look at that word, because maybe there are some people in here tonight and you're saying to yourself, I'm hearing what you're saying, but my heart is heavy.

[22 : 21] right now God's hand upon me is heavy and it's difficult. And actually the hardest thing for me to do is to thank and praise God.

I really don't feel like it. Well, notice the word, sacrifice. A sacrifice always costs.

It's not a sacrifice if it doesn't cost. So I think we're entering into something of what the psalmist is saying here. This is, I would say, the likes of Paul and Silas in the prison in Philippi were doing that

very thing.

They were offering the sacrifice of thanksgiving because they were bruised and battered and they had been beaten and they had been dealt with so unjustly and so harshly and yet they're praising and thanking God.

And you know, the Lord responded to that. And the Lord will always respond to the sacrifice of thanksgiving from his people.

[23 : 32] And you go through the Bible and you'll see all the incidents and all the instances where people have begun to praise God. God it's almost as if God in a marvelous way reacts positively to the praise of his people.

Remember that example of where Judah went out to fight and there were the three armies that had come up against them in the time of Jehoshaphat and the message had come from the prophet stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

And we see that great faith in the life of the king. Because rather than putting out the army he sent out the temple choir. Soldiers were there as well but this temple choir went out first and they were singing praise to the Lord his mercy endures forever.

And you know when they began to do that what happened? The armies that had come up to fight them began to fight amongst themselves. You will find Jonah when Jonah was in the belly of the whale.

And you go through chapter 2 and you see all he's tumbling down through all the weeds. He's in the very depths of the sea. But towards the end of that chapter he then talks about offering thanksgiving to the Lord.

[25 : 05] Thanksgiving from the belly of the whale and as soon as he began to offer the thanksgiving the whale in response obviously to God's dealing spewed him out and he was back on to land.

And you can go through the Bible and so many different places and incidents and instances and you see that God responds to the praise of his people and especially to the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

In other words when it's tough to thank God you make sure I must make sure that we praise and we thank him there. What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

Well my friends he has given us all for us and he is looking to us for our all. Our life, our energy, our time, our talents, our home, whatever we have, whatever we're able to use for his glory, let us seek to do that.

And may we remember this night that it won't be just on a particular Thursday night in November that we thank the Lord but may we seek to constantly, continually, that's what it says in Hebrews, that it will continually offer the sacrifice of praise.

[26 : 37] May that be the way that we live. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for being able to stop for a little while and to reflect and to remember God's goodness to us.

What shall I render to the Lord? We give thanks, Lord, for thy mercy and thy goodness, for thou art a compassionate and merciful God. We give thanks, O Lord, for the great gift of salvation, the unspeakable gift, and may we never tire of reflecting upon it and hearing of it.

And we pray then to bless us, bless each and every one of us tonight, and all whom we love. Put thine arms around us, protect us, do us good, cleanse us, we pray, from all our sin, and receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake we ask it.

Amen.