

No Fear in Death

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[0 : 00] Good evening. It would be worth having Psalm 116 in front of our eyes as we have a look at it this evening.! So it would be great if you got that open. And as you get it ready, let me suggest to you that culturally, we tend to associate certain songs with certain occasions.

Now, I'll choose ones which are neutral, which won't apply to you. For example, if you like rugby, well, you might like rugby, and you're Welsh, we have a national anthem, of course, as do you, but there's a hymn, Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.

Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore. From childhood, that hymn, right or wrong, is associated with watching Wales, as a child, play rugby.

A bit more common and untidy is that if you like football, if you like Liverpool, or even if you don't, you may well know that you'll never walk alone is a song that is always associated with that football team.

Now, Psalm 116 is deeply associated in the mind of the writer or any child who ever, ever read it at Saturday school as a Jewish child.

[1 : 41] So, Psalm 116 is deeply associated with the Passover festival.

And the last thing that a Jewish home ever did on the last night of Passover, a Thursday, was to have a meal together.

And when they had a meal together, they sang as the last thing they did that night. Psalms 113 to Psalm 118, as they recorded for us, as the final Passover hymn.

So, when Jesus Christ goes to the last supper, Matthew tells us in chapter 26 and verse 30, when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

You know the hymn. It's Psalm 113 to 118. Right in the middle of those psalms, as we have them captured in those numbers, would be words that the Lord Jesus Christ would have known since he was a little boy.

[3 : 25] He'd have known them inside out, upside down and round and round. He could sing them any time. Because every year since he was a kid, his family had sung that song the day before the Passover final celebration on a Friday.

So, my friends, when you ever read or sing Psalm 113 to 118, and tonight we're in the center, 116, and we shall look at it in detail.

You need to get, sorry, that's not fair, I need to get, we need to get, this clear point. These words that we're looking at tonight were in Jesus' mind as he walked into Gethsemane.

They were in his mind as Judas Iscariot betrayed him. They were in his mind when he was arrested and beaten. They would have been in his mind as he hung on a cross.

So, we are about to read through again the very psalm that Jesus knew applied to him on the cross.

[4 : 35] The psalm, if you look down at it, refers to the horror of death three times in verses 3, verse 8, and verse 15.

It's a psalm of despair at facing the agony and the horror and terror of death. But it is also a psalm of rescue.

It's a psalm that cries out that God will rescue his nation and his people, as sung at Passover.

When we read this psalm now together, we therefore need to look at it from a certain perspective.

When the psalmist wrote it, he was looking back to the Passover. Make sense? He was looking backwards in history. As he wrote it, he didn't know.

He was writing forwards to Jesus Christ. We live beyond the time of Christ. So, now we can look back via the cross of Christ and the Jesus who knew this psalm applied to himself.

[5 : 57] And then we can apply it to ourselves on this Sunday evening. So that we may walk out of that door tonight saying, I am glad. I am glad that I have a Savior.

I am glad. It is my privilege to be a woman or a man who has Christ in their lives. Psalm 116 is Jesus' song.

The Jesus who knew that as he walked into that cross and grave, who cried out, Father, Father, take this cup from me, but not my will, but your will be done.

The very Jesus Christ, who cried those words, knew he would go to the cross, knew it would be anguish, knew he would defeat death, and knew that you and I would be in this building tonight, looking back.

When he says to us, all right, you, sing the song with me, because it's your song now. It is your song now, because of what I've done.

[7 : 02] So come on, let's get into the song, because if you're a Christian, it's your song, through faith in Jesus Christ. Here we go. Let's have a look at it in detail then.

Verses 1 to 2. Please have a look at it. It's full of emotion. I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice, and my pleas for mercy, because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

Let's sing this song, as it were, as a Christian, if you are a Christian tonight. Jesus' death at the cross, the Passover lamb, as he sang this song, going to that cross, he made it possible for you and me to say this evening, I love the Lord.

I really do. I just love him. Why would we love him? Look at verse 1. Because he has heard my voice.

As Jesus cried to his father that night, he goes on to beat death. He goes on to beat the grave. He goes on to reach you, so that you can say this Sunday evening, I love the Lord.

[8 : 18] Why? Because he hears my voice. He's always listening for me. Look, he hears my pleas for mercy. When life is terrible, when it's gone wrong, when it's broken, who can I turn to?

When I have sinned, when I've let myself down, when I've let my parents down, my family down, when I'm hurt inside for my failure, where can I turn?

And he says, turn to me. You can always turn to me. I will never turn away from you. Isn't that a relief?

If your ability to turn to Christ depended on how good you've been in the last six days, could you turn to him?

I hazard a guess that many of us would say, no, I couldn't. This is a psalm that says, you can turn to him because he paid for your sin. He's paid for it.

[9 : 19] And so, turn to him. Plead to him. Ask him for his help in your adversity. And look at verse 2. Don't you think this is the most beautiful picture?

If a child is shy, this is what you do, isn't it? Of an older person can't hear you very well. You incline your ear to them. This is verse 2. You say, tell me again.

What did you want to say? And this is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ himself when you cry out to him saying, what's wrong? Tell me again.

What can I do for you? What's the matter? Like a parent loves a child. I want to help you, darling. This is the Christ of the Bible.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ that Christians come to worship together on Sundays. He is the God of compassion. The God of comfort.

[10 : 24] But don't make the mistake of thinking he's only there to comfort well-behaved Christians or people who got it perfectly right this week because no one would be available for comfort.

Which is why Christians gather together to remember that through the death and resurrection of the one who sang this song at Calvary. You and I can flee to him and say, I love you.

You listen to me. You care about me. You listen out for me. And I will call on you. Look at the end of verse 2. As long as I live, there will never be a day when you can't call on Jesus Christ.

Never. Not once. In the middle of the night when everybody's asleep. Mum and dad are asleep. Or your husband or wife are asleep.

Or your, anyone who really loves you is fast asleep and you wake up and you don't know what you're going to do. I've got it wrong. I'm frightened. I'm scared. What shall I do? Whose year is always there?

[11 : 33] Christ's year is always there. He never turns away. He never rolls his eyes. This is the wonder of being a Christian.

At that cross, he paid it all so that you could always come to him in all your failures. That's why the reformers, the 16th century reformers, when they talked of grace, the great Thomas Cranmer, the English reformer, he said, you'll never understand grace if you don't feel gratitude.

The grace of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ always engenders gratitude in the human soul. Thank you that you love me. Not just my mum, not just my dad, not just my friend, not just my granddad, that you love me.

Not just the woman next to me. You love me. Me. Personally, me. That's why you died. That's why he's the Passover lamb. And verses 1 to 2, you'll be glad to know are the overture that runs throughout this psalm.

What's the problem for Jesus as he goes to the cross? What's the problem for the psalmist? Have a look with me at verses 3 and 4. He says, the snares of death encompass me, says the psalmist.

[12:56] Well, he's pointing to Christ. They certainly did encompass him that night on the way to Calvary. The pangs of Sheol laid hold of me. I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord.

Lord, I pray deliver my soul. The picture here, look, snares, being trapped like an animal. So let me ask you again, think of times in your life when you feel trapped.

The snare has got you. Where shall I turn? Who shall I turn to? And there's another picture here in verse 3. As if life is closing in on you, you're walking into a dark cave and the rocks are gathering and there's no way out and you're trapped.

That's what these words mean. And what the Lord Jesus, death and resurrection, of the song he sang that night of the Passover, means for you and I tonight, is that when the snares of death encompass us, yes, when that day comes, yes, when the end is nigh, no death will crush us for eternal life is ours.

My life will not end when I take my last breath in this world because my Lord Jesus beat death and it will not crush me. There is a root through the cave.

[14:18] These images are graphic. Ropes, a net, a trap, a burial. And the creator of the universe says, I'm going to go through that so that you, when you go through it, will know that I beat death and my darling, you are mine and I'm taking you through as well.

I love you. You see, the refrain is verses one and two, the chorus is verses one and two. I love you. I'm listening for you. I've got my ear out for you.

Talk to me. Talk to me. Throw all your weight on me. I've crushed the door down for you. I am your Lord and Savior. It's a beautiful psalm.

Beautiful. Who is this Lord Jesus Christ? Look at verse five. Look at these wonderful characteristics. He's gracious. Gracious is the Lord and righteous.

How could God forgive Israel in the old covenant? Because he made a covenant with them and he said, I am your covenant God.

[15:33] And at Passover, they celebrated that the righteous God put the punishment on the Passover lamb. That's what the righteous God did in the Egyptian Passover.

But he's a gracious God because the punishment goes on the lamb to liberate the people from their sin so they can walk free to the promised land. And at Calvary, as we look back through this psalm that Jesus sung, he knew he was singing in verse five that the righteous God wouldn't kill a lamb but would kill his own son.

And the kind and gracious God would rescue you and me because our price was paid at Calvary.

And the price for your rebellion and mine is paid at that cross. And because it's paid, I am free.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. and Christ knew this as he went to the cross. And you and I sit in this room tonight as the recipients of the price paid at Calvary for the righteousness of God and for the compassion of Christ that saves us.

How could somebody not be a Christian? It's mad not to have this hope. When life kicks you in the teeth, we die once and for all in the end until we go to heaven.

[17:05] Everybody does it. It's 100% success rate at this stage. Mortality. But you know we suffer death by a thousand cuts don't we every year?

The pain of rejection, an argument, a fight, a failure, a getting it wrong, a fear of what's coming tomorrow. Death by a thousand cuts and we're asked in this psalm to run to Christ and say you felt it all, Saviour.

You felt it all. I'll come to you. You went through it and you understand me and you're my Lord and I'm running to you. Help me. And there he is like this.

Come here, lovely. Come here. Come to me. I love you, he says. That's how the line starts, doesn't it? I love you, Lord.

And in 6 to 11, you could say them for yourself when the adversity comes because they're words for the believer in Christ. Let me read them. The Lord preserves the simple.

[18:09] I don't think that means the stupid. You know, sometimes where I come from we say simple means a bit dim. I don't think it means that. Well, I know it doesn't.

Here's what it means. It means those who don't pretend to be cleverer than they are. It means the woman and man in this room tonight who says, well, I'm not sure I can follow your accent as a Welsh bloc here in the Highlands, but I get the general drift of the talk.

This psalm was the psalm sung on the night of the Passover festival. The one who was the Passover lamb sung it.

And he sung it knowing that he would die for me. And he sung it knowing that he would break the cords of death for eternal life for me. And he sung it knowing that one day on a Sunday evening in Stornoway, a few people would gather together to try and make sense of their lives last week and next week and say, Lord, are you with me?

And he says, dear, I'm with you always. I went through Calvary for you. Do you think I'd leave you this week? Whatever you do wrong, not a chance.

[19:26] Not a chance, he says. The Lord preserves the simple. When I was brought low, could you say this this week?

Can you look back this month? When I was brought low, he saved me. Return my soul to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with me. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed even when I spoke I am greatly afflicted. I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars.

My friend, if you feel afflicted this week, if your soul is disturbed, if you feel human beings have let you down, look at 11 liars.

If you feel betrayed, it doesn't mean that the Christian doesn't weep. It doesn't mean that the Christian isn't in anguish. Of course, it can't mean that because it's the human condition.

[20:28] But it does mean this. The one who went before us, the perfect one, the one who paid the penalty at Calvary, the one who beat death, he, he knows how you feel.

And he's right with you. He is never going away. He is never going to stop putting his arms around you and saying, I'm here.

That's what we're meant to understand in this psalm. The greatest need of being a human being is met in Christ. The greatest hope for meaning this week and comfort and deep joy in all circumstances is to know Christ is your Saviour and Lord.

We see him as the one who rescues us ultimately from the cords of death and this week from death by 20 cuts which hurt us on the way through the week.

and finally with that in mind let's look at the last few lines from 12 to the end. if what I've said and my interpretation of the psalm for you this evening is true what do you think for the psalmist what do you think the obvious question is?

[21:47] surely it's question in verse 12 what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

Lord if you love me this much if you love me and you know what I've been up to and you know things that my mum and dad don't know my husband or wife may not know you know what's in my head if you died for me and you will never leave me because the covenant is met in your blood and I can come to you any time even in my failure and anguish at life Lord what shall I do for you?

if somebody loves you this much humanly you'd say what can I do to give it back to you? now here's the brilliant climax of this psalm it's the brilliant climax of the Christian life what can you do? here's what you can do verse 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord what? oh here's what I do I go to God and I say hey you saved me didn't you?

you love me don't you? well I'm going to call on your name and I'm going to ask for your help this week is that the response that he wants? surely he wants us to try harder be better keep more rules and he said no no don't be soft here's what I want you to do keep coming to me and saying Lord I can't keep it up can you help me?

I'll never succeed by my own efforts will you help me? he loves nothing more than for one of his children to come to him and say I can't do this but you can please help we lift up the cup of salvation do you see what we do?

[23 : 51] we don't do anything we just ask for more help oh my gosh fancy the chance of going into a new week and saying keep helping me Lord please keep helping me I can't do it and he loves it he's waiting for you to ask there's not 15 things he wants you to fix it's a posture that says help me help me more than ever before and you see that unfolds for the rest of the passage how do you pay your vows to the Lord verse 14 and repeat it in verse 18 well this is how you do it verse 16 you say Lord I'm your servant I'm your servant you've you've loosed my bonds do you see it in 16 how do we go to the Lord for help we say Lord you took my chains off you set my heart free you gave me a new life in Christ what shall I do for you oh it's easy

I come back to you and thank you for cutting my chains loose and I ask you to help me I lift up the cup of salvation Lord you took the chains off keep freeing me up please I can't do it without you this is the response of the Christian no vanity no hubris no arrogance no self-sufficiency complete dependency on the saviour who's listening and loving and yearning to be your greatest ally and friend in all your adversities this week I put it to you that Christians come to church to keep reminding themselves that this is life Satan himself will keep saying to you you're not good enough hopeless rubbish Christian nowhere near as good as him or her you're a disgrace you shouldn't be here next week give yourself a couple of weeks sort yourself out and then you might get a year ring from God the lie of hell it's the lie of hell your saviour wants you to come to him at all times whatever's going on because his love saved you and will continue to give you hope lift up the cup of salvation and say come again Lord come again

I need you now I need you today that's what we offer him and in 17 he tells us it's called it a sacrifice of thanksgiving I'll offer to you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and note the words that come immediately afterwards do you see them and call on the name of the Lord it's the same thing for the third time it's going to God this week and saying Lord I'm giving you myself I can't do anything I'm not good enough I'm too prone to failure but I know this Lord I am thankful and I'm bringing myself to you again this week help me look after my kids properly help me respect my parents properly give me the best chance when no one's watching me to behave in ways that bring me joy because I know you want them but Lord I'm lifting myself up to you help me Lord I can't do it without you so I give myself to you this is how we thank him the total absence of vanity and arrogance that I can make it happen and the total willingness for him in his marvellous love in a way that he knows me that no one in the world knows me to work with me and to change me this is what Jesus Christ achieved at Calvary this is what he will do this week by his spirit in my life and yours and this is what he knew he would achieve on the night before going to the cross as he sang this song so that we could sing it today that's why we sing the psalm today and finally look closely please at verse one and the last phrase in verse 19 if you have doubt or uncertain that this can be the meaning of this psalm well I draw your attention to verse one which starts I love the Lord we meet in church on Sunday time after time for corporate worship that the believer in Jesus might walk out of the building and put their head on a pillow tonight and be able to say I love the Lord and what is the last phrase in this psalm do you see it

I praise the Lord the truths of the gospel are meant to move from the head to the heart so that your heart sings for joy that this is my savior and onto my hands that changes my day to day behavior the greatest human need is love and the greatest love is captured in this psalm by the savior of ultimate love who paid my penalty and will never stop loving me this is the Christian hope this is the Christian life may it be your experience even tonight as a result of the marvelous Lord Jesus Christ and his commitment to you and to

[29 : 40] I Amen well thank you Graham for that wonderful reminder of the love the Lord has for us and what better way to finish our service and to sing some verses from this psalm psalm 116 we're going to sing from verse 1 down to verse 9 it's a sing psalms version you'll find this on page 154 of the psalm books psalm 116 we're going to sing verse 1 to 9 I love the Lord because he heard my voice and listened when I cried to him for aid I'll call on him as long as I prayed we stand to sing from verse 1 to 9 to God's please him as long as

I shall live because he turned to hear me when I pray the hearts of death let down let handle me upon me I and wish of the game with grief and trouble I was overdone then on the name of God I called Lord say miracle And full of grace

Both righteous and compassionate The Lord protects All those of childlike faith When I wasn't with me He rescued me Restore my soul God has been good to you For you, O Lord Have saved my soul from death My feet from stumbling And my eyes from tears Last I made it for you While I have breathed Let's close in prayer Let's pray Lord, our gracious God We do thank you for every way that you Listen to our cries And that we will be able to say I knew this evening I love the Lord Because he has heard my voice And may we be able to go away from here With that sense of praise to you That you remember us in all our needs And that you will remember us Even in this week ahead As we put our trust in you So may you guide us then by your spirit We ask your blessing now on us That grace, mercy and peace From God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit May rest upon and abide with us all Now and forevermore Amen Amen Amen