

I Love the Lord

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Because he has inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

The snares of death encompassed me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me. I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord.

O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul. O Lord, gracious is the Lord and righteous. Our God is merciful.

The Lord preserves the simple. When I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest. For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

[1 : 20] 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. 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. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, I am your servant.

I am your servant. The son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.

[2 : 42] I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. In the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. May God bless the hearing and the preaching of his word. You know, as we've been going through this series of psalms of praise, I think we often, you know, we hear so much about praise in church that we can often misunderstand what praise is all about.

We can gather together and think that praise is affirming truth or giving honor to God or showing him respect.

And certainly praise is not less than any of those things. But praise is, as we're about to see, is celebration. Praise is the overflow of joy.

That's what we see. C.S. Lewis says praise resounds through the echoes throughout the world. Because praise is the overflow of when we enjoy anything, whether it's a good game.

[3 : 55] Sang-wan obviously enjoyed the game. I'm sure I had no impact on his enjoyment last night. Or whether it's a beautiful sunset or the Great Grand Canyon or something like that or a captivating book or a delicious meal.

When we enjoy something, we praise it. We tell others about it. I have one of my friends that loves to tell everybody about the newest thing he's doing.

I just do not take it for anything until six months later to see if he's still doing it. Because he's all about whatever he's into. But he's just like all of us. And the praise of God is the same way.

The praise of God is meant to be the overflow of joy and delight from encountering God's grace. This morning, we have the privilege of studying Psalm 116.

The psalmist has encountered God in a life-changing way and he erupts in praise. It's a very personal and heartfelt song seeming to almost spontaneously flow out of the psalmist.

[5 : 01] But we're not listening merely to this man's discovery of grace. God is speaking to us. Fourth anniversary of this church, God wants us to remember how we encountered grace individually and as a body together.

Though our lives are busy and burdened with cares, God wants our life to be filled with praise. Not because it's the right thing to do or a good thing to do, but because it's the only response to encountering grace.

In a word where we're going, those saved by grace never stop praising God for His grace. Those saved by grace never stop praising God for His grace. I'm going to break this out in four points.

The first is, I will trust you. I will trust you. Threading throughout this psalm, and you probably heard when we read it together, the psalmist is, he's making commitments in response to what God has done.

There's six, I will, future tense, statements, pledges, resolves. The first one, he says, is because of what you've done, I will trust you.

[6 : 10] Look in verse one, he says, I love the Lord because something has happened. He heard my voice. He inclined his ear. Therefore, I will call on him.

And then he begins to describe what happened to him. In verse three, he says, the snares of death encompassed me. Death here is not a thief in the night, but a hidden trap in the dark.

Death is a snare that's captured him. He continues, the pangs of Sheol, just another word to refer to the place of death, laid hold of him.

The grave had already begun reaching out its hands to the psalmist and begun dragging him down like the slimy tentacles of the upside down.

What does all this mean? In metaphoric language, the psalmist is saying, I was about to die. He says, he was in distress and anguish.

[7 : 13] I suffered distress and anguish. Obviously, he's in distress and anguish because he's about to die, but he's also in distress and anguish because this situation was his own doing.

Look in verse six, he refers to himself as the simple. The Lord preserves the simple. Now, the simple in Scripture are not the simple-minded, and they're not those who have followed Marie Kondo into a simplified, minimalistic life.

The simple are unguarded people who are always drifting into trouble. Unguarded people always drifting into trouble.

The greatest danger in the Christian life is not making one or two bad decisions. The greatest danger in the Christian life is drifting away from the Bible, away from community, drifting away until you find yourself in trouble that could have been easily avoided.

And that's what happened to this man. The trap of death was a bed of his own making. Nevertheless, he cries out to the Lord.

[8 : 30] Look in verse four. He doesn't tell us what happened. He tells us what he prayed. I called on the name of the Lord. Oh, Lord, I pray. Deliver my soul. And then the description of this situation concludes without an answer, at least in a narrative form.

But verse five tells us all we need to know. He erupts. Gracious is the Lord and righteous. Our God is merciful. It's an outburst of praise.

He's saying, God answered my prayer. God came to my aid. All I can say, the rest of the story does not matter. All I can say is gracious is the Lord and righteous and merciful.

Look in verse six. He says, the Lord preserves the simple. Those unguarded people who stumble into easily avoided trouble. When I was brought low, he saved me.

There's so much we don't know, but one thing we do know is that God intervened to save him in such a way that he never forgot. I remember years ago, I was reading a biography on missionary Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma.

[9 : 44] Judson was a pastor's son raised in Massachusetts. When of age, he goes away to college, much like most young boys. And in college, he meets a man named Jacob Eames.

Fellow classmate, Jacob Eames, and he become close friends and they study deism together, which is a popular philosophy of life in those days. And so Jacob and he begin to study deism together and Eames slowly lures Judson away from his strong Christian beliefs.

By graduation, Adoniram Judson abandons Christianity altogether. He hides it from his parents. Upon graduation, with great fear, he tells his parents he's leaving to live his own life.

He takes to the streets. He chases the thrill. He lives without restraint, but before long, he's again disappointed and discouraged. The life of his dreams isn't paying off as he dreamt.

He finds no meaning or purpose in all that he's chasing. And so he takes off on the run again. By now, he has nowhere to go.

[11 : 05] If he returns home, he's sure to face his parents' frustration and grief. So he rides on. Late one night, Mr. Judson arrives in an inn to get a room.

The innkeeper warns him. He says, sleep may be tough tonight. There's a man critically ill in the room next door. Throughout the night, he hears the man coughing.

He hears the coming and going of people helping. His mind begins to race through the night, haunted by all of his fears. Is this man ready to die? Does he know what's going to happen when he died?

Is he sure of what's going to happen when he died? What does happen when we die? Am I ready to die? He's haunted by these questions. And then he finally awakes with little sleep.

Next morning, before rushing out, he asks the innkeeper, did the man die? He says, yes. He says, what was his name?

[12 : 08] The innkeeper says, Jacob Eames. Jacob Eames. Jacob Eames. Jacob Eames. His friend from college, Judson can hardly move, hardly move.

For hours, he cannot stop pondering death. If Eames is right, then death has no meaning. It's unimportant. It's just the end. But if Eames is wrong, he's lost. Lost to everyone.

Lost in hell. He wrote about that night afterwards. This could not, simply could not, be pure coincidence. Indeed, he realized, the all-powerful God intervened to make sure all his running would end him next to the very room of his friend from college, listening to him die.

And the all-powerful God intervened to lead him there so that he could intervene to rescue him from the wrath that he was destined to face. In just a few days, Judson became a Christian.

Became a missionary. And like the psalmist, he never forgot how the Lord intervened. In so many ways, what the psalm is helping us do, even with the generic way it's written, to ask the question, how did you come to believe?

[13 : 19] How did you come to faith? What are the details? Whether you were 13, 37, or 63, the story of your salvation is no less planned than Adoniram Judson.

The story of your salvation is a story of intervention. Intervention. Intervention by God alone. Just like the psalmist says, I love the Lord because he heard my cry.

So after the Lord delivers this man, the first thing he does is says, I will trust you. I will, look in verse 2, he says, I'll call on him as long as I live.

That's what it means. I'm going to return to trusting you, confiding you as long as I live. That refrain runs through this psalm. I called on the Lord. Verse 4, again in verse 13, I'll call on the name of the Lord.

Verse 17, I'll call on the name of the Lord. I will trust you because of what you've done regardless of what lies ahead. The second resolve he makes is, I will live for you.

[14 : 23] I will live for you. Because of what you've done, I will live for you. Look in verse 8, he says, for you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

He returns to this, to his distress. He returns to thinking about his distress. You deliver my soul from death. I was about to die and you deliver me. You stepped in to intervene.

You deliver my eyes from tears. You didn't just deliver me from death, you comforted me. You deliver my feet from stumbling. You didn't just deliver me and comforted me. You steadied me and helped me stand back up.

How many can relate to that? He steadied me. He set me on a right course. The psalmist declares in verse 9, I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

Now the psalmist is not talking about his new exercise regimen. Walking is the most basic human movement before planes, trains, and automobiles.

[15 : 25] walking was the main way everyone got anywhere and it's a metaphor for life. What he's saying is I will live for you. Because of what you've done, I will live for you.

I will pledge my life to you. Even more wonderfully, I'll live before you. I love this. The psalmist is not going to let his life be defined by an emotional experience in the past.

The psalmist resolves to make this emotional experience change the way he lives. Sometimes I think we Christians can be looking for a spiritual high much like an addict looks for a hit.

But that's not the way the psalmist talks. He's not just looking for his emotions to be fired. He's looking for his will to be transformed, to be obedient to God.

I will live for you, obey you, and walk with you. Sometimes when God asks us whether we believe in Christ, we point to something that happened in the past.

[16 : 29] We tell them about walking down the aisle or being baptized or about an experience, and that's okay. It's okay. The psalmist, after all, is telling us about a past experience, but it's not okay for something in the past to become the only evidence we believe.

We should not spend too much of our Christian lives looking back to the best days, the past seasons of ceaseless prayer, courageous sacrifice, selfless serving, enthusiastic Bible reading.

Years ago, the Sheridan Hotels had an ad that ran that kind of became a well-known saying they said, what has Sheridan done for you lately?

What has Sharon done for you now? There's a sense in which God is saying to his believers, not merely what has happened in the past, but what are you doing for me now?

When the New Testament says make your calling and election sure, it's not saying write down the date of your baptism. It's saying something different. Are you living?

[17 : 44] For God, make sure you're still repenting. Make sure you're still following. I don't care when you believe. What I want to know is do you believe? Right now. If we could walk through the week, is it real?

Is it real? Living faith, because dead faith sends people to eternal hell. But he continues, you know, living for God isn't smooth sailing.

And I love this. Look in verse 10. He says, I believed even when I spoke I'm greatly afflicted. I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars. What he's saying is I still faced affliction.

I was still bent down, crushed, cringing for what would happen next.

I faced moments of alarm. You ever been the victim of slander and gossip?

[18 : 54] Self-righteousness and suspicion. Ever been betrayed? That's what he's talking about.

I was lied to. I was deceived. Strikingly, he says, not only did I face those moments, but I cried out in those moments.

He quotes, I am greatly afflicted. All mankind are liars. Help me out here. Not the calm, composed prayer for aid, but a panicking prayer for rescue.

But then he says, verse 10, I believed even when I spoke that way. The psalmist is bringing together two things we don't think can coexist.

Faith and belief and fear and panic. I, you know, I think so often we think when we face panic and discouragement and fear, if we're struck down and struck, then faith must be dead.

[20 : 08] But the psalmist is saying it's actually the opposite. You know, the presence of panic and discouragement in times of affliction is actually saying, you're not dead yet. And I love that.

It's actually a sign for life. Interestingly, the only place in the New Testament this psalm is quoted is in 2 Corinthians 4 where Paul is talking about his ministry. Look with me here.

He says, we have this treasure and jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We're afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed.

We have this same spirit of faith according to what has been written. I believed so I spoke. We also believe and so we speak.

Now this is very important. What he's saying is the Christian life is always in tension. We're living in an already not yet kingdom.

[21 : 13] Jesus has already come. Our sins have wonderfully already been forgiven but the fullness of all that he came to do has not yet occurred. The scales of justice have not yet been balanced and so the Christian life is one in which we'll experience both of these things at the same time.

Peace in trouble. Joy in grief. Nearness in longing. Life in dying.

It's exactly what Paul took from this passage and that's what it means I will live for you. I resolve to live for you not when the good times roll because of what you've done regardless of what happens.

Third, resolve. He says I'll give thanks to you. The psalmist declares because of what you've done I'll give thanks to you.

Look in verse 12. 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.

[22 : 27] One commentator said there's scarcely any verses that better capture the right response to encountering God's grace than this one. Remember years ago I had an assistant that worked with me and you know before she she got pregnant so she was moving on and before she left she painted that scripture down to hang in my office up on my shelf to this day.

What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? I'll lift up the cup of salvation. What what she's saying is what what shall I render? What can I pay him?

What can I chip in? You go halvesies on this thing what can I do to repay what you've done for me?

The question is rhetorical. It's much like the hymn says we're the whole realm of nature mine that we're an offering far too small. There's nothing I can do to pay for receiving the grace of God because the grace of God is free and that's why he says this scarcity is there a scripture in the Bible that captures the right response like this.

So he says I'll lift up my cup of salvation. He's saying I'll repay you not by trying to work better do better walk straight or sin less I'll repay you by lifting the cup of salvation by declaring what you have done by rejoicing in your salvation and he's saying I know there's no way to repay you there's no way to give back so this is what I offer I offer you a sacrifice of praise.

[24 : 27] Look at verse 17 he continues this theme I will offer to you a sacrifice of thanksgiving I will not offer you bulls or goats I will offer you a burnt offering I'll offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and I love this after he says I will praise you I will live for you because of what you've done I will give thanks to you and the psalmist in a wonderful way is preparing us for the only right response to what God does for us in Jesus Christ which is to give thanks worship in the Bible is always about responding to what God has done worship in the Bible is always about talking about God's initiative God's intervention God's activity God's action action and taking the first step and coming to us rescuing us and making a way for us to approach him I love the way John Rissberger says it he says from start to finish the Bible story is a story of grace a story of God's initiative to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves by offering us unmerited mercy and undeserved love worship in the Bible is never a bridge that we build out to him but simply a responsive journey we make to cross the bridge he has built out to us he speaks his word and gives his presence we his worshiping people simply respond to what he's done we're not preparing an offering on Sunday morning wonderfully there's no altar in the front of this meeting room as a YMCA but you know there wouldn't be if we had a building there's no altar in the front because our worship is response our worship is a celebration in so many ways that's why we begin you know we do read a lot of scripture here but we read scripture first because we're responding to what God has done what God has said what God has spoken and what God has revealed in Jesus Christ and so while we may sing of creation or God's rule or wisdom or heaven or suffering or need for him or whatever we're mainly going to sing about one thing the grace of God found in Jesus Christ

I will give thanks to you oh Lord point four he says I will serve you I will serve you because of what you've done I will serve you the psalmist cannot stop thinking about what happened to him look in verse 15 he says precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints what's that mean what it doesn't mean is that God loves to watch his people die okay that's not what it means what it means is that when lives are discarded like soiled garments the Lord grieves the Lord cares far from a statement about the

Lord's indifference to death it's a statement about his radical love his grief we see it in Jesus Christ at the tomb of Lazarus and he grieves over their death that's why he rushes to hell in times of trouble because he's the Lord who loves his people and delight in his people and grieves at what sin and Satan and death have done to this world verse 16 he says oh Lord I am your servant I am your servant the son of your maid servant you have loosed my bonds he says once the snares of death encompassed me once the pangs of shield laid hold of me but the Lord loosed the bonds now he says I am your servant he continues in verse 18 I will pay my vows to the Lord what he's saying is

I'm a living sacrifice as the old to continue the line of the old hymn where the whole realm of nature mind that were an offering far too small love so amazing so divine demands my life my soul my life my all there's no more sacrifices to be offered except one's life Christianity could not be a more demanding religion once once bound by sin now I bind myself to you Paul most often famously referred to himself as a slave of Christ once bound in death's chain now I take up another chain my life is no longer mine I no longer live for myself I'll follow you

I'll serve you I'll lay down my life for you there is to be one common trait among Christians total self denial and following Christ Christ remember years ago reading about Bob Dylan visiting the White House so when when President Obama was in the house Dylan performed in the White House as a celebration of the civil rights movement I don't know what it was how many years it was other artists were there like Joan Baez John Mellencamp Smokey Robinson one of Buddy's favorite bands all the other artists did the usual they came to sound check I mean it's the White House after all they practiced they jumped at the chance to take a picture with President Obama and Michelle but not

[31 : 17] Dylan he didn't want anything to do with all the hoopla he walked in played the times are a changing one of the most famous songs from the civil rights movement and left Obama later commented he wouldn't come to rehearsal I quote usually all the guys are practicing before the set in the evening he didn't want to take a picture with me either usually all the talent is dying to take a picture with me and Michelle before the show but he didn't show up for that he says he age I was sitting on the front row comes up shakes my hand sort of tips his head a little gives me a little grin and leaves that was it he left that's the only interaction I had with Bob Dylan and I thought that's how you want

Bob Dylan you want you don't want him to be cheesing and grinning with you you want him to be skeptical of the whole enterprise that's so true we want Bob Dylan clearly skeptical of the president and the government it's a civil rights movement after all well God wants Christians to be sold out in self denial in a world of self pursuit God wants Christians to stand out and sold out self denial and following not because we owe him something but because we owe him everything those saved by grace never stop praising God for his grace notice how the psalm ends look at verse 18 he says I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people in the courts of the house of the Lord

I love it it concludes with exactly the way this psalm has served us through the years as a song of the church a song that we sing the fire that began in secret blazes in community this intensely personal psalm of faith and trust doesn't end in a solo mission of self improvement or self fulfillment this intensely personal psalm recalling the intensely personal encounter this man has had with God ends up in throwing himself into the people of God into throwing his life into God's purposes I love the way Sinclair Ferguson said it those through whom the kingdom has been signally advanced are rarely if ever lone wolves God in his gracious sovereignty characteristically assembles a small community and strikes a match wonderfully Jesus did not gather so that or Jesus did not die so that we would gather in secret to say

I love you I trust you I live for you I give thanks to you I serve you Jesus died so that we could gather to say it together we trust you Martin Luther you say the church is just one Christian slogging through the dirt of life saying to another Christian keep going that's what we're saying we trust you God when cancer strikes when divorce is in the balance we trust you we're crying out to you we gather together say we trust you we we live for you we're not letting off the accelerator because we want to live for you with every thought word and deed and action may the thoughts of our mind the meditation of our heart be acceptable to you we give thanks we want to be happy people we serve you so happy anniversary I'm humbled to trust the Lord with you and press on with let me pray for us

Father in heaven we thank you for these few minutes to think about your word and think about these things we pray that I pray that you protect this church you would keep it wonderfully it's your church may greater days be ahead of us filled with the fruit of the gospel for your glory help us we pray in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com