

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms ***
*** Topic: Thanksgiving * Psalm 116 * 7/13/25 ***

MAIN POINT

As Christians, we need to remember the depths from which God has saved us, and show our thankfulness to Him by acknowledging His goodness to us through worship, prayer, and living our lives in service to Him..

INTRODUCTION

If you had a time machine, and could travel back to witness one event from the Old Testament, what would it be, and why?

Many answers could be given here. Some of the reasons may involve seeing God supernaturally interrupting natural laws to either save His people.

Today we will be looking at Psalm 116, which a Psalm of Thanksgiving. God has rescued the psalmist from a life-threatening event, and the psalmist expresses his thanks to God for saving him.

UNDERSTANDING

Note to study leader: This Psalm has no introduction, so we can't be sure who wrote it, or what was going on when it was written. It is clear that God had rescued the Psalmist from dire circumstances.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 116:1-4

We read in these verses that the psalmist cried out to God, saying, "LORD save me!" Looking at verses 1-4, how did he summarize the initial circumstances that motivated him to cry out to God?

The psalmist was in a very precarious position, likely in peril of dying. He describes his situation as having the cords of death entangling him. He felt anguish, distress, and sorrow. He felt he was in imminent danger of being forcibly being taken to Sheol, which is the place of the dead.

The psalmist started his song of thanksgiving by announcing, "I love the LORD." Considering God's response to his cry for help, why is the psalmist making this proclamation of love for God?

God turned His ear to him and heard his cry for mercy.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 116:5-11

Note to study leader: Consider making a list on the white board of the answers people come up with for the following two questions.

After experiencing God's intervention on his behalf, the psalmist makes several statements about God. What are some of the conclusions he expresses in verses 5-7?

- The LORD is gracious and righteous (Verse 5).
- The LORD is full of compassion and mercy (Verse 5).
- The LORD saves and protects the simple and lowly (Verse 6).
- The LORD provides rest for our souls (Verse 7).
- The LORD deals bountifully with us (Verse 7).

In verse 8, we read of three ways that God delivered the psalmist, and in verse 9, he tells us the reason God delivered him was so he could walk before the LORD in the land of the living. How does each of the three deliverances mentioned in verse 8 relate to him being able to walk before the LORD in the land of the living?

- The LORD delivers my soul from death (Verse 8).
- The LORD delivers my eyes from tears (Verse 8).
- The LORD delivers my feet from stumbling (Verse 8).

“First, His soul from death. Note, It is God's great mercy to us that we are alive; and the mercy is the more sensible if we have been at death's door and yet have been spared and raised up.... The deliverance of the soul from spiritual and eternal death is especially to be acknowledged by all those who are now sanctified and shall be shortly glorified.

- *Secondly, His eyes from tears, that is, his heart from inordinate grief. It is a great mercy to be kept either from the occasions of sorrow, the evil that causes grief, or, at least, from being swallowed up with over-much sorrow. When God comforts those that are cast down, looses the mourners' sackcloth and girds them with gladness, then he delivers their eyes from tears, which yet will not be perfectly done till we come to that world where God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.*
- *Thirdly, His feet from falling, from falling into sin and so into misery. It is a great mercy, when our feet are almost gone, to have God hold us by the right hand (Psalm 73:2,23), so that though we enter into temptation we are not overcome and overthrown by the temptation. Or, "Thou hast delivered my feet from falling into the grave, when I had one foot there already."*

Matthew Henry, Commentary on Psalm 116

These verses from Psalm 116 are very similar to the prayer of Jonah while in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2:1-7). In what ways did Jonah's predicament match the words of this Psalm?

Jonah had tried to flee from the LORD, and found himself on the verge of death and on the verge of being sent to Sheol in death. His only hope was to cry to God and beg for his mercy and compassion.

Verses 10 and 11, the psalmist contrasts his trust in God with his distrust in people. What lessons can we learn from this?

Romans 3:4 says it this way; “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

“This verse emphasizes the fundamental truth that God's words and nature are inherently true and reliable.... God's truths stand firm regardless of human opinions or beliefs.... all humans, in contrast, can be unreliable. This does not imply that every single person is outright deceptive, but rather highlights the imperfect nature of humanity..., our declarations can be influenced by many factors. This is why placing our trust in God above all else is essential.” “Bible Savvy” Commentary on Romans 3:4

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 116:12-19

Note to study leader: Make a list on the white board of the answers people come up with for this question.

Verse 12 asks, “What shall I give in return to the LORD for all His goodness to me?” What are some of the ways the psalmist answers his question in verses 13-19?

- I will lift up the cup of salvation (Verse 13).
- I will call on the name of the LORD (Verse 13).
- I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all His people (Verse 14).
- I will serve God (Verse 16).
- In verses 17 and 18, the second and third items on this list are emphasized by repeating them.

THOUGHTS RELATED TO VERSES 13-19

1. "I will lift up the cup of salvation" (Verse 13).

"I will take the cup of salvation, that is, I will offer the drink-offerings appointed by the law, in token of my thankfulness to God, and rejoice with my friends in God's goodness to me " this is called the cup of deliverance because drunk in memory of his deliverance. The pious Jews had sometimes a cup of blessing, at their private meals, which the master of the family drank first of, with thanksgiving to God, and all at his table drank with him." Matthew Henry Commentary on Psalm 116

In the spiritual warfare passage in Ephesians 6, Christians are told to put on the whole armor of God. One piece is "the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17). Since we as Christians already have assurance of salvation, what does it represent for us to daily put this helmet on?

We have such a great and sure hope in our salvation. We need to live in light of this sure hope.

2. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants" (Verse 15).

This verse is difficult to translate, since the word "precious" can also mean "costly". NLT translates it as "The LORD cares deeply when his loved ones die." And Adam Clark's commentary on Psalm 116, says, "The saints are too precious in the Lord's sight lightly to give them over to death." We will consider the meaning conveyed by most translators by looking at some cross-references related to the death of a saint.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ ISAIAH 46:4, ISAIAH 54:17, MATTHEW 10:29-31, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-9, PHILIPPIANS 1:22-25, REVELATION 6:9-11, AND REVELATION 15:2-3

Note to study leader: the Revelation passages are included to show that even though martyrdom may appear like defeat, in reality it is victory as it leads to us being ushered into God's presence.

Summarize how these verses should shape our view of physical death as Christians.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord! This relates back to the helmet of salvation 😊.

3. "Truly I am your servant LORD" (Verse 16).

"Two ways men came to be servants: —First, by birth.... Secondly, By redemption. He that procured the release of a captive took him for his servant." (Matthew Henry, Commentary on Psalm 16). We are servants of God by both of these means, and so we owe Him our very lives.

APPLICATION

Summarize the list of ways the psalmist committed to giving back to God for all His goodness to him in verses 12-19 for God's compassion and deliverance.

The psalmist worshiped God publicly and served Him personally by sacrificing his desires to serve God.

Is there something on this list where I am falling short of dedicating this part of my life to God? What can I start doing this week to better "repay" God in this area?

PRAYER

Father we thank you for your mercy, care, compassion, and deliverance. Give us the grace and strength to worship You by praising You in the presence of fellow believers, and by offering our lives as living sacrifices in service to You.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 116

Verse 1. The psalmist began with a declaration, “I love the LORD.” He later would share other reasons for loving God, but first he affirmed God heard his appeal (literally “voice”). Heard does not denote mere hearing but listening with an intent to action. The word translated mercy stresses the psalmist’s recognition of his dependence on God to help him (Ps. 28:2, “pleading”). It is related to the words translated “gracious” and “generously” in Psalm 112:4-5, which we studied in the previous lesson. The psalmist expressed his love for God for hearing his prayers.

Verse 2. The Lord turned His ear to the psalmist’s request. This concept is even more personal than “heard” in verse 1 and suggests a careful, deliberate consideration of the psalmist’s petition. Thus God is attentive to prayer. I will call describes talking to God about anything good or bad—calling on Him in light of the relationship he has with God. Talking with the Lord about everything just makes sense! The words out to Him do not actually appear in the Hebrew text but are clearly implied by the context. The expression as long as I live literally means “in my days.” As long as the psalmist had days to live, he wanted to live them in harmony with God.

Verse 3. The psalmist’s word pictures highlight the desperate nature of his situation. He felt as if ropes of death were wrapped around him! The identical Hebrew expression also occurs in Psalm 18:4, where it describes David’s desperate situation as he faced King Saul and other enemies. The parallel expression torments of Sheol further accentuates the life-threatening nature of the psalmist’s situation. Sheol typically describes death and the grave, the place where the dead go. (See Ps. 88:3.) The word translated overcame literally means “found” and conveys the idea that the ropes and torments had a life of their own as they worked together against the psalmist. The word trouble is related to the word “torments.” Encountered literally means “found” and is related to the word translated overcame. The word sorrow denotes deep emotional pain or grief, as when a parent loses a child (Gen. 44:31). The psalmist appeared trapped.

Verse 4. The psalmist called to God in his distress. The word order of the Hebrew text emphasizes the power present in the name of the LORD. The psalmist’s brief prayer LORD, save me! expresses a deep plea, or entreaty. The psalmist needed God’s help right then, and he needed it desperately.

Verse 5. The psalmist affirmed three of God’s attributes that shaped the Lord’s dealings with him. Gracious denotes the extending of undeserved favor toward people. Righteous denotes both the inner quality of integrity and the right behavior that flows from it. Compassionate describes a deep inner feeling of sympathy for the needs others have.

Verse 6. The word guards also means “watches over” and again suggests God’s tender care. Inexperienced also can be translated “simple” or “open-minded.” Inexperienced people are not as discerning with regard to making good choices (Prov. 9:4) or bad choices (Prov. 7:7) and thus especially need God’s care. But God offers protection to such people.

Verse 7. Rest depicts a place or state of unthreatened security. The same word describes the resting place of a bird (Gen. 8:9, “resting place”) as well as the security Ruth obtained when she married Boaz (Ruth 3:1, “security”). A related word occurs in Psalm 23:2 to describe calm, “quiet” waters suitable for sheep. Verse 8. The psalmist fully recognized God as the Source of his deliverance. The Lord had rescued him from the death that earlier threatened him (Ps. 116:3). God dried up his eyes that flowed with tears of sorrow and guarded his feet from stumbling.

Verse 9. What would the psalmist do in response to God's delivering him? He would walk before the LORD; that is, he would live in a way that fully honored God. He would live in obedience, surrendering his life to the Lord in complete trust. As he did, he would follow in the spiritual footsteps of his forefather Abraham, who likewise walked before the Lord. The expression land of the living occurs commonly to describe life on earth (Ps. 27:13). The prophet Isaiah foretold Jesus' death by saying "He was cut off from the land of the living" (Isa. 53:8).

Verse 10. The word believed comes from the word from which we get our word "amen." It means "to cause to be confirmed." Even when the psalmist found himself severely afflicted, he confirmed God's faithfulness in his own heart, displaying faith in all circumstances.

Verse 11. Alarm denotes a state of severe fright. In his alarm the psalmist looked around and affirmed everyone is a liar. His desperate condition may have heightened his awareness of people's universal sinful condition (Rom. 3:4,23). He ultimately could trust no one but God.

Verse 12. The psalmist actually never could repay the LORD for all the good God had done in his life. His rhetorical question affirmed His utter dependence on God's grace.

Verse 13. God's servant would take (literally, "lift up") the cup of salvation, an allusion to bringing a drink offering of gratitude to the temple (Lev. 23:13). He would worship the LORD (literally, "call on the name of the Lord") in this way as a public testimony.

Verse 14. The Law of Moses did not require the Israelites to make vows to the LORD, but people who made vows were to fulfill them completely (Deut. 23:21-23). The psalmist fulfilled his vows in the presence of all His people, not to draw attention to Himself but to encourage others. In this way the psalmist stressed the importance of public worship. His worship would inspire others to worship.

Verse 15. The psalmist earlier had affirmed how God rescued him from death (Ps. 116:3,8). Whenever death comes for God's faithful ones, it is always valuable, or precious, in the LORD'S sight. The triumphant end of an earthly life lived for God is a special moment.

Verse 16. The affirmation LORD, I am indeed your servant reveals another aspect of the psalmist's relationship with God. The Hebrew word translated servant literally means "slave." A slave had no rights in the ancient era and found fulfillment in doing his master's will. So it was with the psalmist and his Heavenly Master. He found his highest joy in serving God. The designation the son of Your female servant stresses the psalmist's godly heritage. His mother had served God faithfully, and he would too. The Lord had loosened the psalmist's bonds by rescuing him from the adversity of death.

Verse 17. The Law of Moses outlined procedures for a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Lev. 7:12-15). God determined how His people were to approach Him; thus, if the people brought a thanksgiving offering, they were to bring it as He prescribed. As in verse 13, the expression worship the LORD literally means "call on the name of the Lord".

Verse 18. God's servant again affirmed he would fulfill the vows he had made to the LORD. He probably had made vows when he asked God to deliver him from his enemies and life-threatening circumstances (Ps. 116:3-4,10-11). Perhaps others had heard his vows to God, so the psalmist thought fulfilling them in the very presence of all His people was especially important. In response to God's deliverance, he would bring glory to God through His public worship and praise.

Verse 19. As the Law of Moses commanded, the psalmist fulfilled his vows in the courts of the LORD'S house, where he brought his sacrifices of thanksgiving (Ps. 84:2,10). The temple stood in Jerusalem, the city King David had made Israel's capital and to which he had brought the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 5:5-9; 6:1-23). His son Solomon would complete the temple around 960 B.C. The psalm ended with the exclamation hallelujah!—a command for all God's people everywhere to praise the Lord.