

God's Grace in Life and in Death

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Date: 20 January 2013

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[0:00] Beloved, please open your Bibles again to Psalm 116. I'll be quite honest with you that several weeks ago when we were here to be with your pastor, my father-in-law, I left his bedside knowing that would be the last that we would speak on this side of glory by every estimate.

And for the eight-hour drive home, my mind was pondering this verse in Psalm 116, verse 15, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his godly ones, the death of his saints.

And I don't know about you, but sometimes it feels vital to me that I understand what it means. And I thought this was a verse that I understood.

It's one I had committed to memory. It's one I had pondered, but it seemed much more important now. It's one I loved, lay dying. I wanted to know how.

How is it precious in the eyes of God? How does God make his grace known? So as soon as I was home, I began looking at Psalm 116 again.

[1:28] And if you think about it, if you read this Psalm, verse 15 is rather confusing. Because it is speaking about God's grace in death in the middle of a psalm that is celebrating deliverance from death.

So here in this context, our psalmist, who I believe is David, it's not unscripted as such, but I am going to preach like it is. I think what David is doing here is drawing our attention.

In fact, I in some ways think verse 15 is meant to stand out in bold relief in the midst of this psalm in which David is celebrating God's great deliverance.

He then says, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. I think the way to understand the psalm is to be reading it all at the same time on three different levels.

In one sense, the psalmist is saying, I have been saved from a great trial. And many of us can testify to the same, can't we? That at some point in this life, we, like the psalmist, cried out for mercy and God brought mercy and he delivered us from some great trial.

[2:49] And so we're to understand the psalm on this level. But secondly, I think we're to understand the psalm on the level of being saved from our sins. If you read this psalm, you can't help but inject yourself here and say, yes, this is me.

When God rescued me from the guilt and the power of sin in my life, this is my testimony. He delivered me. I'm walking in the land of the living. And yet there's even a third level.

This is the testimony of you and me when we stand before God in the true land of the living. When we behold him as he is and see him face to face.

And we can say, I love the Lord because he heard my voice. He inclined his ear to me and he answered and he saved me. So on every level, I think David wants us to understand this is the testimony of one who loves God, who loves God on this earth, who loves God when he's saved from his sins and who loves God in glory.

And his testimony is the same in all three places. I love God. I told my church as we looked at this very passage, I remember a time when I was afraid to say I love God.

[4:15] I just felt too unworthy to say such a thing. Can I really say I love God? And for a while, I didn't think there was anywhere in the Bible that gave me ground to stand on until I came to Psalm 116.

And I thought, oh, bless the Lord, for he's given me words to speak back to him. I love the Lord. Can you say I love God? Can you say I love the Lord?

Oh, yes, you can. When do you feel love for someone? Isn't it when, oh, many different times, but certainly when you feel you're being heard.

One of my brothers-in-law gave testimony yesterday to dad and saying, you know, and I always felt like dad listened. He was interested in me. He kind of made me feel important.

And we could all testify and say, yeah, you just had that way of listening to you. And you felt so loved. You felt someone was paying attention to you. And in the same way, the psalmist begins here and he says, you know, I love the Lord because God has taken me seriously.
[5:18] My requests have been acted upon. So he begins in verse 1. I love the Lord because he's 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. That's where David begins. He gives a testimony here.

Don't you love testimonies? Don't you love to hear of God's grace active in another person's life? Well, our psalmist, that's what he's doing today. He divides his testimony into two parts like many of you do when you're joining the church or giving testimony before baptism. He says, this is what God did to me. That's number one. And number two, here's how I'm living now by his grace. And that's really what the psalmist does here in Psalm 116. So we begin with this idea of what has God done to me?

Well, he begins by saying I have this love for the Lord because he's heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. And daily answers to prayer are a great fuel to your love for God.

[6:23] Which makes me think if we turn that around and say, I'm not feeling great love for God, then we ought to ask, are we daily praying to God? Are we communing with our God?

God. Now, I'm going to speak about my father-in-law here and there throughout this time because he's much on my heart. And I think you will find, and I'm not drawing attention to him, but as my brother preached yesterday, we ought to imitate his faith.

And I think as you read through this psalm and you ponder your pastor, you will find much of his life here. And I couldn't help but observe, as David begins the psalm, this idea that a love for God grows as we're communing with God.

And no wonder he had such love for God because of his faithful daily communion with him. And how does God listen to his people? Well, David says he inclines his ear.

How do you listen to a little child in a crowded room? Don't you like it, children, when mom or dad or someone here at the church just bends down? I always have to bend down.

[7:35] And they just bend down so they can get an ear near you and they want to hear what you're going to say. That's what David says. He's picturing God great and holy and high in his habitation.

And he says, God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, heard my plea for mercy. He bent down a listening ear to me. And then David says something surprising.

He does exactly what you hope that charity you donated to will never do. Thank you, Mr. Martin, for your donation. I know you just gave yesterday, but since you gave yesterday, would you give today?

And then the next day. Thank you for giving the last two days. Would you give the third? That's what David says here. He says, because God inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live. For the rest of my days, every day, I'm going to call on God.

Because God, listen to me. Once we grasp grace, we see there is no other solution.

[8:44] How will he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, not also with his son, graciously give us all things? Since God gave the greatest, we are assured that he will freely give the least.

Our problem is not that we ask God for too much, but that we rarely ask God for enough. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

A big God deserves big prayers. And if I could say it reverently, God himself is an easy mark. He is generous and he lends daily.

He is glad to give. He is eager to hear your prayers, Christian. Now, how does a man get here? How does a man get to a place with big prayers and big love for his God? Well, listen to the testimony of this man.

[9:49] Here is what God did for me. First of all, I was dead. Verse 3. The snares of death encompassed me. The pangs of Sheol laid hold on me. I suffered distress and anguish.

He was surrounded by death traps. The icy tentacles of death were pinching at his ankles. And the result was he was in distress and in anguish.

Trouble and sorrow. Perhaps you have been sick to the point of death. Or perhaps you recall that time when you realized you were spiritually dead.

There is a brother in our church who was in an ice fishing hut with my co-elder. One of my co-elders. And that co-elder of mine was evangelizing another guy in the ice fishing hut. And the whole time he was evangelizing this guy, this guy, the guy who's in our church, was under conviction. He didn't say a word.

[10:51] He just head down, whatever you do in an ice fishing hut. Don't ask me. Then he went home. And his testimony was, I went home and I could not sleep.

I stayed up all night crying, shaking, trembling. All the next day I called in sick to work. I didn't know what to do. And then finally that night God broke through.

And the light of the gospel of his grace, which I had heard for the first time only 24 hours earlier, broke through in my life. And I called out to God and he saved me.

That man's walking with the Lord. Has been for about five years now. He could testify to the anguish and to the sorrow. The snares of death were pressing in on me.

I was dead. But I called on God. Verse 4. Then I called on the name of Yahweh, of the Lord. Oh, Yahweh, I pray, deliver my soul.

[11:55] Spurgeon said of this verse, real trouble produces real prayer. Boy, oh boy, doesn't it? Your child lies dying and you pray. The marriage begins to crumble and you pray.

You lose your job and you pray. Real trouble produces real prayer. And David's torments led to one of the best examples of a prayer every sinner can pray.

Oh Lord, I pray, deliver my soul. Oh, Yahweh, I pray, save my life. It is short, it is specific, and it's to just the right person.

Notice the brevity of this prayer. Seven words in my text. Oh, Yahweh, I pray, deliver my soul. When the need is great, brevity trumps quantity every time.

This prayer is specific. Save my life. And this prayer is directed to the right person, to the covenant-keeping God, Yahweh.

[13:02] God as he has revealed himself. Here is a prayer that anyone can make. Have you prayed this prayer? Have you called out to God and said, save my soul, save my life?

Young or old, that seems to me an easy prayer to make if it's from the heart. Is that a prayer that you have made? Have you looked to God and realized that you stand before a holy God as a sinner?

That there's nothing you can do to clean up your life? There's nothing you can do to make yourself right? Right? And have you been repulsed by that sin and rejected that sin? And then have you looked to God and cried out to Him, oh Lord, save my life?

You say, well, yeah, I tried that once. Well, friend, if you tried it once and it didn't take, try it again until it does. This is life and death stuff. And you will die.

And I will die. You know, I thought my father-in-law would never die. Or I thought we'd get to the finish line at the same time.

[14:12] That was silly. I don't know why I thought that. I had to wrestle with the Lord about His timing. I didn't like His timing. But His timing was right and His timing was good.

And His timing is His timing. And it will be your timing. His time for you. What will you say in that day? Will you say that Christ is your all?

That He's your only hope? Your only place for salvation? Will you be able to say, I cried out, oh Lord, save my life. And God did a work in me.

Do you think God is strong enough to save you? Do you think you have out-sinned His grace? Do you think you're too cool, too amazing, too sinful, too wrong, too bad, too tall, too short, too something for God?

No, God's love can break through in you if you will call out to Him. And here He's given you the very words to say. You go home this afternoon and you pray this prayer from your heart and this God will save you.

[15:17] And then you'll be able to say what the psalmist said next. I was dead. I called on God.

But I was saved. Verses 5 and 6. Gracious is the Lord and righteous. Our God is full of compassion. He's merciful. The Lord preserves the simple.

When I was brought low, He saved me. Yahweh is gracious. He is righteous. He is merciful. What proof do you have, preacher?

The cross. If you ever want to see the righteousness of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, then look to the cross of Jesus Christ. For there you see all three.

The righteousness of God. What does it mean that God is righteous? He is the standard of judgment. He's the ruler by which everything else is measured. He's the level against which all other lines are plumb or not.

[16 : 20] God is righteous. And His righteousness is seen in the punishment that He poured out on His own Son for sins. God is merciful. He spares people from the punishment that they deserve.

And God is gracious. He gives favor, bestows favor on those who are undeserving. What a great God this is.

Do you know this trifold description of God is how God revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai. It is what the prophets would use to call the nation of Israel back to God.

It's what the people of God would argue back to God in prayer when they had sinned, saying, God, You are merciful, You are gracious, and You are righteous. Restore us. Keep covenant with us.

Bring us back again. And so this is what your God is like. God is righteous. God is merciful. God is gracious. And so it is no surprise then that He can take the simple.

[17 : 24] David refers to himself that way. A fool. A practical atheist. Someone who's lived his life like God doesn't really exist.

And like what God has revealed in His Word is untrue. Someone like that God can take and save.

Do you see it? It's right in front of you. Verse 6. The Lord preserves the simple. When I was brought low, He saved me.

Now can you say that, Christian? He saved me. He saved me. Lots of people can say, I go to church. Lots of people can thank God for scoring a touchdown and do the tee bow.

Lots of people can self-identify for surveyors, Christian. I'm a Christian. But can you say, He saved me.

He saved me. I recalled speaking to my father-in-law once about God's work of grace in his life. And he testified to a time early in his Christian experience.

[18 : 31] Going out the back door of what's now Stan and Deb's house. And out the back door to the back lawn. And jumping up and down for joy at God's grace to him.

Now, Christian, do you know that joy? Can you look to God and say, Thank you for saving me. The psalmist goes on and he says, This is how I live now.

So, testify what God has done to me. Let me tell you how I live now. And it's good advice for all of us. First of all, he says, I preach the gospel to myself.

Verse 7, Return, O my soul, to your rest. For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. 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, now this is going to sound a little different if you have the NIV. It's a tricky thing to get from Hebrew to English.

[19 : 33] And I'm going to read it according to my translation here. I believed, even when I spoke, I am greatly afflicted. I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars.

You know, you don't listen to anyone more than yourself. Every husband there is saying, wait a second. No, no, it's true.

You listen to yourself even more than your wife. For even when she speaks, you are filtering and you are commenting and you are processing. You don't listen to anyone more than yourself.

So you ought to make sure that you're telling yourself what's true. That's what David does here. He speaks to himself. Oh my soul, he says.

I am now doing some self-addressing. Oh my soul, oh my soul, return to your rest. The peace that comes from remembering that the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

[20 : 39] Return, oh my soul, to your rest. Go back to the day of salvation, soul. Remember your roots. Remember the cross. If I am full of anxiety, I must be full of pride and self.

If my soul feels no rest, it is not God's fault. We know it, don't we, that anxiety, worry, is the great pride barometer.

That's why Peter says, you know, the one they sell in the Christian bookstores, cast all your cares upon the Lord. Did you ever notice there's a dot, dot, dot at the front and dot, dot, dot at the back?

Well, take out the dots because it starts with, humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the proper time, throwing, casting all your cares, all your anxieties upon him because it matters to him, because he cares for you.

But there's no throwing cares until we've humbled ourselves. Is your soul lacking rest? Then repent of your pride.

[21:53] Oh, how I preach to me. Remember the gospel. You see, that's what he does here. Verse 7, Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

If you're worried, if you're anxious, then tell your soul, God has dealt bountifully with you, soul. What is the gospel? What has the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished for me?

Well, he tells us, he has delivered my soul from death, he's delivered my eyes from tears, he's delivered my feet from stumbling, he's delivered my soul from death, I am eternally safe, I am going to live until God says, come here.

He has delivered my eyes from tears, oh, they flow with our sorrows sometimes on earth, but every one of them will be wiped away in heaven, won't they?

No more tears. None. He has delivered my feet from stumbling.

[23:02] No ultimate failures for the Christian on earth and a sure entrance into heaven. Even Pilgrim in Bunyan's classic, Pilgrim's Progress, as he drew near, looked like he wasn't going to make it.

He believed he'd come this far and now he was going to fail. There was nowhere to put his feet in that dark Jordan and he had to cross it alone. But eventually, the truth came to mind and he clung to what is true and he found the ground solid beneath him and before he knew it, he was up on the other side, having shed that which is mortal and taken on that which is imperishable.

He has delivered my feet from stumbling. I will walk before the Lord, he says in verse 9, in the land of the living. I will walk. My conduct, my life, is going to be lived out before the Lord.

I'm going to perform for the audience of one in the land of the living, among men in this life, those people who are alive but even more greatly before the redeemed and all the angels in heaven.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. But he's not by this implying that life is without trouble. That's why I think this translation is a helpful one in verse 10.

[24:29] I think, if I've understood it right, that what he's saying is, I believed even when I said out loud, I am greatly afflicted. Even when I cried out to God, enough!

Crushed here! Afflicted here! Can't take any more here! Even when I said that, I believed. Just as our Lord, as he hung upon the cross, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's all he said. But he quoted from Psalm 22, didn't he?

How does Psalm 22 end? That's where it starts. How does it end? It ends in victory. It ends in deliverance. It ends in confidence. It ends in the psalmist entrusting himself to this great God.

And so, every Christian, as we go through trials, we can say, you know, sometimes there are some very silly things that come out of my mouth. Sometimes there are some very self-centered prayers that go toward heaven.

[25:40] Sometimes I even do terribly regretful things because of the press of life against me. But even at my worst, I can say, I believed. And I believe.

And my faith is in Christ alone. No matter your troubles, Christian, preach the gospel to you first. No tribulation, no distress, no pressure, no persecution, no physical suffering, no danger can separate you from the love of Christ.

Jesus is at God's right hand now interceding for you. No one can snatch you out of his hand.

Remember John 10. Jesus says, no one can snatch you out of my hand. And then he says, no one can snatch you out of the Father's hand because you're in the double grip of God and no one can snatch you out of his hand.

salvation, joy, and holiness are the present possession of every child of God, everyone who is found in Christ.

Salvation, joy, and holiness are yours. He has delivered us from death. He has delivered our eyes from tears.

[26:52] And he has delivered our feet from stumbling. So the psalmist says, I preach the gospel to myself. I remind myself of what God has done for me in Christ.

Secondly, I ponder God's grace to me. I think verses 12 and 14 are really running parallel with verses 16 to 19.

There's one slight difference between those two sections. In the first, he says, I'm pondering God's grace to me. How should a Christian respond to God when she ponders the gospel?

What effect ought it to have? The psalmist tells us, praise, prayer, and proclamation. Three lovely Ps.

Praise. I lift up the cup of salvation. He begins, verse 12, what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? Just told my soul to ponder the benefits. Now what shall I render to God for all these gifts, for all his goodness, all his grace toward me?

[28:05] I will lift up the cup of salvation. I will praise. To lift the cup of salvation could have the idea of an offering that was made, and you would lift the cup, a drink offering, before God, but it's not necessarily that.

It could also have the idea of simply taking a cup and drinking it. And I tend to think that's the idea here. That he's saying, we're to drink from the salvation that God has provided for us.

Remember Jesus' own words, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. there is no greater praise to God than to receive and to glory in God's gift of salvation in Jesus.

The one greatest way you can praise God is to glory in his salvation, to give him praise. So we are to praise. We are also to pray.

We see again this idea, I will lift up the cup of salvation, verse 13, and call on the name of the Lord, like verses 1 and 2. He who understands the value and the freeness of grace always comes back to ask for more.

[29:18] There is always enough, and there is always more. So we praise, we pray, and we proclaim, verse 14, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Typically someone would make a vow when they were in the straits. Maybe you have made a vow to God. I hope you kept it. People will vow things like this.

If you can get me out of this Lord, then I will do blank. And our psalmist had made a vow. And he says, I will pay my vow in the presence of all of his people.

Private mercies deserve public praise. We have to gather together week by week and say, this is what God has done for me. Not just in the past, not just in the gospel, most certainly there, but in the last week, here's what God has done for me.

I called upon him and he answered. Here are the prayers that God has been actively answering in my life. We ought to give him much praise and much glory for his work. So pondering grace is going to provoke praise and prayer and proclamation.

[30:33] But drop down to verse 16 and now he changes gears just a little bit. He's going to say the same three things flow out of this but instead of pondering grace he seems to be pondering redemption in particular.

Being purchased, being bought, being set free. So he says in verse 16 Oh Yahweh I am your servant I am your servant the son of your maid servant you have loosed my bonds.

Interesting isn't it? I am a slave whom you have set free. I am a slave of my God a glad and happy servant of my God.

I have been redeemed and redeemed slaves offer the thanksgiving sacrifice. The thanksgiving sacrifice was the only one in which you would eat part of it.

It was kind of the well a little bit like thanksgiving. What do you do at thanksgiving? You cook a really nice meal. You don't devote any of it to priests.

[31:34] You may want to start devoting some to your pastors. They appreciate that. But then you sit down and you eat the meal with thanksgiving to God for what he has given you. And under the old covenant there was this way of coming and making a thanksgiving offering and you would bring the beast and part of it would go to the priest and part of it would be burnt but part of it would come back to you and you and gather your friends together and speak about what God had done and why you were giving a thanksgiving offering and eat and drink and enjoy so David says I will offer you verse 17 the sacrifice of thanksgiving the thanksgiving!

That's my praise and if you think about it it was that offering which was the unique base of the Lord's supper and so here we had in verse 12 drinking and here we have in verse 17 eating which can't help but point my heart at least to every time we celebrate the Lord's supper and remembering what Christ has done for us from this praise comes prayer the fourth time in the psalm he says I'm going to call on the name of the Lord and then proclamation I do all of this in front of all of God's people he expands it a little bit there in verse 18 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 of Jerusalem hallelujah praise the Lord I'm going to get as many people as I can all assembled and I'm going to tell them what God

has done for me but now there is one thing missing how does verse 15 fit into all of that precious in the sight of the

Lord is the death of his saints for as you follow through this psalm you realize that the psalmist is rejoicing in God's great deliverance which seems to me it can only mean one thing but the care and love expressed by God in saving us in this life from eternal death is a sure foreshadowing and token of how he will be with us in our day of physical death precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his godly ones only the living are foolish enough to ignore death it is more reliable than gravity and more certain than depravity your heart will stop your brain waves will cease and if you are a Christian that moment will be precious to God today you will be with me in paradise it is far better to depart and to be with Christ that moment will be precious and that's all we know my question remains unanswered how what will he do what will he say how will he minister to his saints you see we die in faith too we live live live by faith but we die in faith and you will cross that river all alone as will I and in that moment we will call out to God oh Lord save me save my soul and then perhaps after a long battle perhaps in a moment of time in the twinkling of an eye we will stand before God forever and forever and forever no more sin no more weakness you and God friend are you living like you're going to die your pastor did and his death was precious in the sight of the Lord let us pray father I pray that you would make the testimony of this psalm the testimony of every person here Lord make it so that we all walk before the Lord in the land of the living our only hope is [36 : 55] Jesus Christ we know he's the only savior the world is ever going to be introduced to you there's not going to be some other way to heaven he is the way and the truth and the life and nobody gets to you except through him I pray for my family I pray for my brothers and sisters I pray Lord for every soul that is here that you would do your work that everyone here would know and everyone here could say God saved me make it so to your glory to your praise and to your honor you are able to do it so do it now we pray in the name of Jesus Amen Amen