

SONG: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

<https://youtu.be/LarFhGeE-ac>

SONG: "Rock of Ages"

https://youtu.be/gM7gt_cSxjw

Psalm 116 is a personal psalm of thanksgiving for God's special deliverance. It comes after a life-threatening incident or period in David's life. Note that context revealed in verse 3: "The sorrows of death compassed me." Yet that is not where David began his psalm.

VERSE 1

David began the psalm with a bold statement of his love for God and faith in Him: "I love the Lord" (vs. 1). What a simple statement that is. Do you love the Lord? It's direct. It's understandable. It's personal. "I love the Lord." Do we often think about that? I tend to think about God's loving me and the many ways He expresses that love, in particular His blessings and care. If someone asked me, "Do you love the Lord?" I would certainly say, "Yes." Seldom, however, do I stop to think about how I love the Lord—unless, of course, I am singing. For me, singing is the way my heart and voice express my love for the Lord. "Oh, how I love Jesus," the gospel song says, "because He first loved me." How often I find myself overwhelmed with (for lack of a better word) emotion as I sing.

This morning I was listening to Adrian Rogers on my drive in to work. He was preaching on a simple text, Revelation 22:17: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come, And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I thought of Jesus' response to Andrew and the Apostle John when they first encountered Jesus after they asked Jesus where He was living: "Come and see" (John 1:39). It's an invitation into His presence. Philip repeated that same invitation to Nathanael when he asked whether any good thing

could come out of Nazareth: “Come and see” (vs. 46). Or what of the Samaritan woman in John 4, who invited the men of Sychar to “come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did” (vs. 29)? Jesus rebuked the Jews in John 5 because they would not “come to me” that they “might have life” (vs. 40). Revelation 22:17 contains the invitation of the Holy Spirit, the invitation of the church, the invitation to and from anyone hearing the gospel, the invitation to anyone who spiritually thirsts. God’s invitation to enjoy His love is for “whosoever.” I thought of Chris Rice’s “Unnamed Hymn” included in last Sunday morning’s virtual worship, “Come to Jesus,” and the refrain echoed through my heart.

When we love God, we want everyone to know and love and enjoy Him. David said, “I love the Lord.” Note the word “LORD” is in all capital letters. That tells us it refers to the covenant God of Israel, the God who has revealed Himself to His people—“I AM” (Exod. 3:14). People talk about “a higher power” but who or what do they mean? I don’t love “a higher power.” I love God who revealed Himself and His love in Jesus, who died for my sin. “Oh, How I Love Jesus” reminds us “It tells me of a Saviour’s love who died to set me free. It tells me of His precious blood, the sinner’s perfect plea.” That is not some generic “god”; that is God who has revealed who He is and what He is like. Him I love.

The word LORD appears sixteen times in this brief nineteen-verse psalm. That name for God appears 793 times in the Book of Psalms. If the psalms were all of equal length, we would expect only 5 per psalm. One source I consulted said there were 2,471 verses in the psalms. “LORD” appears in 32% of the total verses in the psalms; yet it appears in 84% of the verse of this psalm. It is remarkable that no other name for God, not “God” (Elohim), or “Lord” (Adonai), or “God” (Elah, El, Elim) appears. Shaddai (“Almighty”) does not appear or El-Shaddai, “God Almighty.” Not even “Lord of hosts” appears. In every instance, David used “LORD,” denoting the particular relationship God and Israel enjoyed.

David expanded on his rationale for loving God: “Because he hath heard my voice and my supplication” (Ps. 116:1). God is the living God (that’s what “I AM” in Exodus

3:14 means). He hears and answers prayer. Life without the living God who hears and answers prayer is inconceivable to the believer. How often do we talk to God out loud when no one else is around? The hymn "Tell It to Jesus" reminds us "He is a friend that's well-known; You've no other such a friend or brother." Our God, the God of the Bible, the living God is alive and He hears and answers our "supplications" (vs. 1). "Voice" can be translated "thunder" or "noise." Sometimes we just make noise to God, the kind of grouching or even complaining we make to really good friends. "Supplications" is plural and comes from a Hebrew word that means "mercy." The idea is appeals for mercy or grace. We simply seek out the mercies of the living God. David said, "God heard me." Have you ever tried to talking to someone (maybe your children or grandchildren) and you could tell they just didn't hear you? Oh, they heard the sounds of your words, but not the meaning of your heart. God hears us. Think of how radical that is: the God who spoke matter into existence will pay attention to one puny voice among six billion creatures formed from the dust of the earth! Our politicians may not hear us, but God does.

VERSE 2:

A second reason, David gave for loving God is "he hath inclined his ear to me" (vs. 2). This may simply be an expansion on the ideas expressed in verse 1 about God hearing us, but it has a more personal feel to it. While we know God is spirit (John 4:24) and does not have human ears (except in the Person of Jesus!), the idea in the word "inclined" is to stretch out, extend. The picture is of someone who really does want to hear. We've all been in situations in which we may not be able to hear in a conversation and have leaned toward the speaker. That is the idea David had in mind here. God leaned toward him. That is an indicator of God's concern with our concerns. Peter reminded us, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Joseph Scriven captured that in 1855 when he wrote, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in care." David determined, "I will call upon him as long as I live."

While the second half of verse 2 looks like a vow in reciprocity for God hearing and caring about David, it is not. “Therefore will I all upon him as long as I live” is merely a reasonable and logical response to the blessings of knowing God, the Self-revealing One, the Self-existing One, does hear and care. If we were to look at it in just a practical sense, when something “works,” we use it. Prayer works not because it is prayer but because of the One to whom it is addressed, the living God who listens and cares. All too often the people in authority are too busy or important to listen to the little people; yet God, exalted Lord of the universe, never is.

VERSE 3

Verse 3 details the specific situation David recalled: “The sorrows of death compassed me.” “Sorrows” translates a noun that speaks of boundaries or bands. All the indicators and constrictions of physical death had surrounded David. He could feel their constraints. He was surrounded with no apparent way out. He amplifies that: “The pains of hell gat hold upon me.” “Hell” is Sheol, the grave, the place of the dead, both believers and unbelievers in the Old Testament. Jesus made clear a distinction in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16) when He spoke of Abraham’s bosom and “the great gulf fixed” (vs. 26). Before the cross, believers went to the part of Sheol, or the grave, known as “Paradise” (Luke 23:42), and unbelievers to “hell, being in torments” (16:23). “Hell” there translates the Greek word Hades. Ephesians 4:8, quoting Psalm 68:18, seems to indicate that at the resurrection, Jesus lifted all in Paradise into what we know as heaven. At the same time, “hell” (Luke 16:23) is not the final destination of unbelievers, who will be delivered “into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14).

“Gat hold upon” (Psalm 116:3) pictures seeking out and finding. David pictured the “pains,” or tight places, of death seeking him out as a one who was hunted. The imagery flips as he noted, “I found trouble and sorrow.” “Found” is the same word for “gat hold upon,” and “trouble” is the same word as “pains.” “Sorrow,” however, translates a word for “grief.” Whatever the situation, and we do not know what it

may have been, David had been in dire straits.

VERSE 4:

What changed the situation? “Then called I upon the name of the LORD” (vs. 4). David sought God’s help. “Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found call ye upon him while he is near” (Isa. 55:6). He even provided the specific content of his request: “O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul” (Ps. 116:4). Notice once more that David was praying not to some “higher power” but to the living God of Israel, the “LORD,” or Jehovah— God who called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God who led Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness, God who chose David as king and promised him an heir. “Beseech” is merely an interjection, like “Ah,” and leads to the true request: “Deliver my soul.” “Deliver” has the idea of slipping away or escaping. Rescue is implied. God, rescue me, let me get away; it can even mean “save.”

VERSE 5

David then moved to praise without as yet any answer to his request: “Gracious is the LORD.” “Gracious” comes from a root “only used as an attribute of God” (Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew-English Lexicon*). It appears in God’s declaration of the divine name in Exodus 34:6. There it immediately follows “merciful,” or compassionate. In addition to being “gracious” (Ps. 116:5), God is also “righteous.” Mercy would not be mercy if there were not justice. God is just, but He is also merciful. Jesus took our judgment on the cross that we might receive mercy. “As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him” (Ps. 103:13). Psalm 85:10 explains, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” John explained it: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (1:14). David then reiterated, “our God is merciful” (vs. 5). Notice the expanded view after prayer from self to the wider world of believers: “Our God.” Where previously David’s concern had seemed merely personal, now he expressed a testimony for the nation: “our God is merciful.”

VERSE 6:

After contemplating the character of God, “righteous” and “merciful” (Psalm 116:5), David turned to the outworking of that character in life: “The LORD preserveth the simple.” “Simple” is one of the five words Proverbs uses for a fool, this one emphasizing the fool who knows nothing. This is the uneducated fool, not the morally perverse fool who “hath said in his heart, There is no God” (14:1). Kidner writes “‘Silly’ would hardly be too strong a term for these gullible, feckless people who roam the pages of Proverbs drifting into trouble. It is humble of the psalmist to identify with them” (p. 408). David seems to be describing himself here: “I was brought low, and he helped me.” *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says “brought low” describes “those who lack rather than the destitute” (Vol. 1, p. 190). “Helped” is hardly adequate to express the depth of meaning in the original. “Saved” might be a better translation of the word, a form of which is Joshua or Yeshua. He saved me. I think David has both physical and spiritual salvation in mind here.

VERSE 7:

I have written in my Bible above this verse “Exhale.” There is a pause in pace and tone here in the psalm introduced by David’s counsel to himself: “Return unto thy rest, O my soul.” All of us talk to ourselves. But what are we telling ourselves? Those words become the map for our tomorrows. “Keep the heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). In Genesis 42:36, Jacob entoned the *Eeyore* attitude of gloom and doom: “All these things are against me.” It is almost the exact opposite of Romans 8:28-39. An old deacon once reminded me that believers are never to be found “under the circumstances.” He also told me that if the outlook wasn’t good, to try the up-look. Good advice.

David called his soul to “return unto thy rest” (Ps. 116:7). He exercises spiritual discipline to control his mind and heard: Go back to rest. Calm down. Chill out. But it is not mere self-talk; it has a basis: “The Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” “Dealt bountifully” has the idea of rewarding, to deal with fully.

VERSE 8:

In verses 8-11, David supplied more of the details of his experience and God's bountiful dealing with him: "delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." Spiritual and physical rescue, rescue from grief and pain, and rescue from reputational and person disaster all had been provided. The three phrases seem to almost tumble out of David's pen and pile on each other. The bountiful dealing of God covered every area of life.

VERSE 9:

David moved on to share his furthered determination: "I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living." "Walk before the LORD" simply has the idea of living a transparent life with a clear conscience before God, attempting to please Him in every area. Kidner described it as allowing the emotions to "fire the will, giving his delight a practical turn and lasting effect by this fresh resolve" (p. 409).

VERSES 10-11:

David explained his rationale: "I believed, therefore I have spoken." Paul quoted this same verse in 2 Corinthians 4:13 as his rationale for addressing the Corinthians. Faith was the whole basis of David's testimony. Yet as he expanded in the rest of the verse and into verse 11: "I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars." "Afflicted" means crushed, put down, humbled. To admit that is no sign faith is dead. As Kidner noted, "Its pain betokens life." Only living thing can feel pain. "Trouble frankly faced cries out to God" (p. 410). Kidner recalled the words of "Abide with Me," written by H. F. Lyte as he was dying of tuberculosis: "When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me." David's grief and despair was such that he was disillusioned with life and people.

VERSE 12:

Next David considered what the appropriated response would be to the LORD who so bountifully rescued him and saved him. “For all his benefits toward me” encourages us to remember Psalm 103: “Forget not all his benefits.” It then lists forgiveness, healing, redemption, steadfast love and compassion. The words in the original in both psalms come from the same root, which also appeared in the words “dealt bountifully” (Ps. 116:7) that David spoke to himself. This is the fruit of that meditation.

VERSE 13:

First, David determined he would trust more and pray more (“take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD”). This pictures thanksgiving for the salvation God had provided.

VERSE 14:

Second, David determined to do what he had already promised God (“I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people”). This would be public and thus a profession and encouragement to others. This is one of the great dynamics of public worship that we are missing with a quarantine and social distancing. Ecclesiastes 4:12-13 reminds, “If two lie together then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him: and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Separation from the fellowship of God’s people weakens us all. The enemy would drive us apart and separate us, weakening opposition in the world.

VERSE 15:

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” reemphasizes God’s deep concern and care for his own people. They (we) belong to Him. In the context of this passage, David was stressing that God was intimately involved in the events He brought David through.

VERSE 16-18:

Note the first words of verses 13, 14, 17, 18: “I will.” David’s experience of God’s grace transformed his perspective of the future. He determined to offer “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (vs. 16). Hebrews speaks of “the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips giving thanks to his name.” Sabine Baring-Gould echoes this in the second stanza of “Onward Christian Soldiers”: “Hell’s foundations quiver at the shout of praise.” Baring-Gould wrote a sixteen volume history, *The Lives of the Saints*, that surely gave him ample evidence. Verse 16 contains another repetition of David’s determination to pray more: “I will call upon the name of the LORD.” He repeated as well his personal determination to “pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all the people” (vss. 14, 18).

VERSE 19:

David concluded this psalm in the Great Hallel (Praise, Hallelujah), by again speaking of determination to publicly proclaim God’s name: “In the courts of the LORD’s house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.” If the last call to worship were not translated, it would read: “Hallelujah!”

Did David pen this psalm in some distant cave, hiding from Saul? Did he write it when he fled to En-Gedi with its fountains? We do not know. We do know that he came through whatever low period he experienced with renewed faith and renewed determination to worship with God’s people when they gathered. That might be a significant point for us as we endure quarantine and separation.

Song: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship:

<https://youtu.be/fbs9PhxeOCs>

NOTABLE PRAYER REQUESTS:

Beverly and Mike Beardain—health

Wisdom—President, Governor, Mayor

Church leaders—encourage and guide

Shut-ins—encouragement and provision

