

Psalm 116

Praise for deliverance from death

Psalm 116:

This psalm is one of the most personal of all the thanksgiving psalms (note the many occurrences of the personal pronoun “I”).

The psalm is composed of three distinct parts: first, a declaration of praise (verses 1-2); next, the psalmist recalls his troubles and how the LORD delivered him from them (verses 3-11); finally, he concludes with a description of what he will offer in thanksgiving for what the LORD has done (verses 12-19).

Note that his thanksgiving will be given publicly, as the law required.

Verses 1-19:

(See note on Psalm 113:1-9).

This is an intensely personal “thank you” psalm to the LORD for saving the psalmist from death (116:3, 8).

The occasion and author remain unknown, although the language used by Jonah in his prayer from the fish’s stomach is remarkably similar.

While this appears to deal with physical death, the same song could be sung by those who have been saved from spiritual death.

- I. The LORD’s Response to the Psalmist’s Prayer for Deliverance from Death (116:1-11).
- II. The Psalmist’s Reaction to God’s Deliverance of Him from Death (116:12-19).

We have many reasons for loving the LORD, but are most affected by his loving-kindness when relieved out of deep distress.

When a poor sinner is awakened to a sense of his state, and fears that he must soon sink under the just wrath of God, then he finds trouble and sorrow.

But let all such call upon the LORD to deliver their souls, and they will find him gracious and true to his promise.

Neither ignorance nor guilt will hinder their salvation, when they put their trust in the LORD.

Let us all speak of God as we have found him; and have we ever found him otherwise than just and good?

It is of his mercies that we are not consumed.

Let those who labor and are heavy laden come to him, that they may find rest for their souls; and if at all drawn from their rest, let them haste to return, remembering how bountifully the LORD has dealt with them.

We should deem ourselves bound to walk as in his presence.

It is a great mercy to be kept from being swallowed up with much sorrow.

It is a great mercy for God to hold us by the right hand, so that we are not overcome and overthrown by temptation.

But when we enter the heavenly rest, deliverance from sin and sorrow will be complete.

We shall behold the glory of the LORD, and walk in his presence with delight we cannot now conceive.

Verses 1-8:

This psalm, which was apparently a thanks for deliverance from the “sorrows of death”, pictures God the Father leaning over the banisters of heaven (inclined “His ear”), to hear the cry of the hurting: He listens with such intensity, especially when His children cry out in their sickness, sorrow and suffering.

Psalm 116:1 "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice [and] my supplications."

The Hebrew rather means, "I love, because the LORD hath heard," etc.

That is, the psalmist was conscious of love; he felt it glowing in his soul.

His heart was full of that special joy, tenderness, kindness, and peace, which love produces.

And the source or reason of this, he says, was that the LORD had heard him in his prayers.

"Because he hath heard my voice and my supplications":

That is, this fact was a reason for loving him.

The psalmist does not say that this was the only reason, or the main reason for loving him, but that it was the reason for that special joy of love which he then felt in his soul.

The main reason for loving God is his own excellency of nature.

But still there are other reasons for doing it, and among them are the benefits which he has conferred on us, and which awaken the love of gratitude (compare notes at 1 John 4:19).

It may be applied to Christ, who offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, and was always heard.

And for which he thanked his Father and loved him (Heb. 5:7).

The LORD loves us, in spite of the fact that we sinned.

Jesus gave His body on the cross, while we were yet in sin.

We love Him because He first loved us.

The psalmist loves the LORD, because He heard his prayer.

God's love to man is an unselfish love.

Man's love is conditional.

Psalm 116:2 "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon [him] as long as I live."

Not as hard of hearing, for his ear is not heavy that it cannot hear.

He is quick of hearing, and his ears are always open to the righteous.

It rather denotes his readiness to hear; he hearkens and hears, he listens to what his people say, and hears them at once, and understands them, though ever so broken and confused.

When their prayers are but like the chattering of a crane or swallow, or only expressed in sighs and groans, and even without a voice.

When nothing is articulately pronounced: moreover, this shows condescension in him; he bows his ear as a rattler to a child, he stoops as being above them, and inclines his ear to them.

"Therefore will I call upon him as long as I live":

Or "in my days"; in days of adversity and affliction, for help and relief.

In days of prosperity, with thankfulness for favors received.

Every day I live, and several times a day: prayer should be constantly used.

Men should pray without ceasing always, and not faint.

Prayer is the first and last action of a spiritual life; it is the first thing a regenerate man does, "behold, he prays"; as soon as he is born again he prays, and continues praying all his days.

And generally goes out of the world praying, as Stephen did, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"; and it is the Lord's hearing prayer that encourages his people to keep on praying, and which makes the work delightful to them.

Christ was often at this work in life, and died praying, Luke 6:12.

While I am alive, I will call upon the name of the LORD.

There is no help, except the help the LORD can bring.

The LORD always hears our prayer.

He is always listening for the call of His children.

I will call, because He hears and answers, is what the psalmist is saying here.

Psalm 116:3 "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow."

Dangerous and deadly calamities, as bitter as death.

Or, the cords of death.

"Of hell":

Or, of the grave; or, of death.

Another term for grave/death.

Either killing pains, or such agonies and horrors as dying persons use to feel within themselves.

"Gat hold upon me,":

Hebrew, found me.

I.e., surprised me.

Having been long pursuing me, at last they overtook me, and seized upon me, and I gave up myself for lost.

This is describing a man, before he has tasted of the grace of God.

Man within himself, is headed for death and hell.

The only solution to the problem, is to let the Lord come into your life and bring life to you.

In this world, there is trouble and sorrow.

We begin to die the day we are born.

There is no chance for man to save himself.

God saw the plight of fallen man and sent the Savior.

In Him, we have life.

Psalm 116:4 "Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul."

Upon the LORD himself in prayer for speedy deliverance.

Or "in the name of the LORD", in the name of the Messiah, the only Mediator between God and man; "saying", as follows, and which word may be supplied.

"O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul":

My life.

Save me from death.

This was not a cry for salvation, but for life.

It is an example for us, however, to call on God when we feel that the soul is in danger of perishing.

For then, as in the case of the psalmist, we have no other refuge but God.

When there is no place to go for help, then it is time to cry out to the LORD, and He will hear and answer.

Jesus is the Deliverer.

It was the cry of the Israelites to God, that caused God to send Moses to deliver them from bondage.

The bondage of the spirit is even more urgent to be delivered from.

The LORD has always sent the Deliverer to help His people in time of distress.

There is no more earnest prayer, than when it seems there is no hope.

Psalm 116:5 "Gracious [is] the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God [is] merciful."

So the psalmist found him, calling upon him.

So he is in Christ, the author and giver of all grace, to help in time of need.

"And righteous":

Faithful to his promises, just in every dispensation of his providence, even in afflictive ones. Righteous in punishing the enemies of his people, and in saving, justifying, and pardoning them for Christ's sake.

"Yea, our God is merciful":

Compassionate, tenderhearted, a heart full of pity, as a father to his child.

And sympathizes with his people under all their afflictions, and saves them out of them (see Psalm 86:5).

We all deserve to die for the sins we have committed.

It is the grace and mercy of God that saved us.

His mercy endures forever.

The one thing that brings help on the double from the LORD, is for us to cry out: Be merciful to me, a sinner.

The righteousness of the Lord has been shared by the Christians.

He gave us His righteousness to be clothed in, if we are believers.

Psalm 116:6 "The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me."

Such as have but a small degree of understanding, either in things natural or spiritual, in comparison of others.

Babes, as the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions render it, so in the Talmud (see Matt. 11:25).

Such who are sensible of their lack of wisdom, and what they have they do not lean unto or trust in, but being sensible of their weakness commit themselves to the LORD.

They are sincere and upright, harmless and inoffensive, artless and incautious, and so easily imposed upon by designing men.

But the LORD preserves them, as from sin, from a total and final falling away by it.

So from gross errors and heresies; he preserves them from the snares and pollutions of the world, and from the temptations of Satan, so as not to be overcome with them.

He preserves them by his Spirit, power, and grace, safe to his kingdom and glory.

"I was brought low and he helped me":

The psalmist returns to his own case, and gives an instance of the divine goodness in himself.

He had been brought low by affliction of body, by distress of enemies, through want of the necessities and conveniences of life.

He had been brought low as to spiritual things, through the weakness of grace, the prevalence of corruption, the temptations of Satan, and the hidings of God's face.

But the LORD helped him to bear up under all this; he put underneath his everlasting arms, and upheld him with the right hand of his righteousness.

And He helped him out of his low estate, and delivered him out of all his troubles, when no one else could.

When things were at the greatest extremity, and he in the utmost distress, just ready to go down into silence and dwell there (Psalm 94:17).

The Targum is, "he looked upon me to redeem me."

Those who are worldly wise and self-sufficient, think they do not need help from the LORD.

God helps the humble.

1 Corinthians 1:27 "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;"

Psalm 116:7 "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee."

Luther, "Be thou again joyful, O my soul."

The meaning seems to be, "Return to thy former tranquility and calmness; thy former freedom from fear and anxiety."

He had passed through a season of great danger.

His soul had been agitated and terrified.

That danger was now over, and he calls upon his soul to resume its former tranquility, calmness, peace, and freedom from alarm.

The word does not refer to God considered as the "rest" of the soul, but to what the mind of the psalmist had been, and might now be again.

"For the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee" (see notes at Psalm 13:6).

There is a rest for the believer.

I believe there can be perfect peace for the believer all the time (even in time of trouble), if we will just put our total trust in the Lord.

To be at peace with the world is one thing, but to be at peace within yourself is just entirely another thing.

The peace that we should all seek is, to be at peace with God and oneself.

If you are at peace with God, then somehow, you are at peace with the world.

Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

The dealing bountifully with us, could easily be speaking of God giving man the greatest gift that one can receive.

He gave us eternal life through the sacrifice of His Son.

Psalm 116:8 "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, [and] my feet from falling."

My life.

Thou hast saved me from death.

This is such language as would be used by one who had been dangerously ill, and who had been restored again to health.

"Mine eyes from tears":

Tears which he had shed in his sickness, and in the apprehension of dying.

It may refer to tears shed on other occasions, but it is most natural to refer it to this (compare notes at Psalm 6:6).

"And my feet from falling":

From stumbling.

That is, he had not, as it were, fallen by the way, and been rendered unable to pursue the journey of life.

All this seems to refer to one occasion, to a time of dangerous illness.

The tremendous thing the psalmist is speaking of here, is the salvation provided for us through Jesus Christ.

He will wipe away all tears from our eyes.

He has delivered us from sin and death.

He even strengthens us in our walk here, for Christ in me is my strength.

His light is ever shining before us that we might see the way and not stumble and fall.

Look with me, at the next Scripture and you will see how we walk without stumbling and falling.

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Verses 9-14:

The psalmist decided to renew his dedication to God.

Devotion is not just a matter of love but of surrendering one's life.

Psalm 116:9 "I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

As in the sight of the omniscient God, according to his word and will, and in such manner as to please him.

So Enoch's walking with God is by the apostle explained of pleasing him (compare Gen. 5:22).

And so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions render it, "I will please the LORD"; or, as the Syriac and Ethiopic versions; "that I may please the LORD"; be grateful to him.

Or walk gratefully and acceptably before him, sensible of the obligations I am under to him.

And this, in the strength of grace, he determined to do "in the land of the living".

In this world, where men live, and as long as he lived in it; or in the church of God, among the living in Jerusalem.

With whom he resolved to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the LORD.

The land of Canaan is thought by Jarchi and Kimchi to be meant.

And this being a type of heaven, the meaning may be, that he should walk and dwell where living and glorified saints will be for all eternity.

And so, it is an expression of his faith of future glory and happiness, agreeably to what follows. "I will walk": A vow of obedience.

We see in this, as in the Scripture above, that the walk of the believer in Christ will be upright.

Our walk in this life reveals to the world what type relationship we have with the Lord.

The land of the living, in this particular Scripture, possibly means here on this earth in front of the sons of men.

Sometimes it means in heaven, where men never die.

Verses 10-19:

When troubled, we do best to hold our peace, for we are apt to speak unadvisedly.

Yet there may be true faith where there are workings of unbelief; but then faith will prevail; and being humbled for our distrust of God's word, we shall experience his faithfulness to it.

What can the pardoned sinner, or what can those who have been delivered from trouble or distress, render to the LORD for his benefits?

We cannot in any way profit him.

Our best is unworthy of his acceptance; yet we ought to devote ourselves and all that we have to his service.

I will take the cup of salvation; I will offer the drink-offerings appointed by the law, in token of thankfulness to God, and rejoice in God's goodness to me.

I will receive the cup of affliction; that cup, that bitter cup, which is sanctified to the saints, so that to them it is a cup of salvation; it is a means of spiritual health.

The cup of consolation; I will receive the benefits God bestows upon me, as from his hand, and taste his love in them, as the portion not only of mine inheritance in the other world, but of my cup in this.

Let others serve what masters they will, truly I am thy servant.

Two ways men came to be servants.

By birth.

LORD, I was born in thy house; I am the son of thine handmaid, and therefore thine.

It is a great mercy to be children of godly parents.

By redemption.

LORD, thou hast loosed my bonds, thou hast discharged me from them, therefore I am thy servant.

The bonds thou hast loosed shall tie me faster unto thee.

Doing good is sacrifice, with which God is well pleased; and this must accompany giving thanks to his name.

Why should we offer that to the LORD which cost us nothing?

The psalmist will pay his vows now; he will not delay the payment: publicly, not to make a boast, but to show he is not ashamed of God's service, and to invite others to join him.

Such are true saints of God, in whose lives and deaths he will be glorified.

Psalm 116:10 "I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:"

“I believed”:

Faith in God and His ability to deliver preceded the psalmist's prayer for deliverance.

This verse is quoted by the Apostle Paul in (2 Cor. 4:13).

It rehearses the principle of walking by faith, not by sight.

“I believed”, is speaking of the faith this psalmist had.

He is saying that during the difficulties, his faith kept him going.

The affliction was great, but he never stopped believing.

The affliction just made him pray that much more earnestly.

Psalm 116:11 "I said in my haste, All men [are] liars."

“All men are liars”:

Either the psalmist is reacting to his false accusers or to men who say that they can deliver him but have not.

The psalmist here was judging all men as liars, because the people he was around were giving him that impression.

He is also saying, if I had taken time to think on this, I would not have judged all men by the actions of the few.

Psalm 116:12 "What shall I render unto the LORD [for] all his benefits toward me?"

“What shall I render”:

God needs nothing and puts no price on His free mercy and grace.

The psalmist renders the only acceptable gift; obedience and thanksgiving.

Praise often swells up in the context of adversity.

Despite the difficult times David had been through, there is no discouragement here, but rather a psalm of praise and thanksgiving for what the LORD had given him.

Not just this psalmist, but all believers have felt this same thing.

The LORD has done so much for us; how can we repay Him? The only thing He wants is our faith in Him and our love.

Psalm 116:13 "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD."

The “cup of salvation”:

This is the only place in the Old Testament where this exact phrase is used.

It probably has the meaning of the cup in (Psalms 16:5; 23:5).

I.e., the redeemed life circumstances provided by God, in contrast to (Psalm 75:8), which speaks about the cup of God’s wrath.

This describes God’s provision.

The Lord fills the cup of every believer's life with the blessing of salvation.

That cup is free to humanity, but it cost Jesus everything!

The next Scripture is so beautiful to me, because salvation is so simple.

1 Peter 1:9 "Receiving the end of your faith, [even] the salvation of [your] souls."

Notice in verse 13 above, that it is a conscious act of willingness to receive on the person who gets salvation.

It is even a determination (I will), to be saved.

Romans 10:13 "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

This leaves absolutely no doubt to how simple it is to receive salvation.

Verses 14-18:

Suffering will either focus the sufferer on God's blessing and provision or cause the person to flee from Him.

David ends the psalm with four commitments that should be on the lips of every child of God: I will remember "my vows" to Him; I will render my love to Him, I will return my thanks to Him; I will receive His great salvation (116:13).

Psalm 116:14 "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people."

"I will pay my vows":

Most likely this refers to the vows made During the time of duress (compare 116:18-19).

The psalmist has decided, that the rest of his life, he will spend fulfilling all the promises he made to God.

He is not ashamed of his LORD.

He will do this in the presence of the people.

Whatever you promise God, you must do, without exception.

Verses 15-16:

The psalmist realized what a special blessing his deliverance ("loosed my bonds"), was in light of verse 15.

Therefore, he reemphasized his role as a servant of God following the example of his mother.

Psalm 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the LORD [is] the death of his saints."

(Compare Psalm 72:14).

It is not a matter of indifference to God, the when and under what circumstances each of his saints dies.

Rather, it is a matter of deep concern to him.

"In him are the issues of life and death" (Psalm 68:20).

And he appoints to each man the day and attendant circumstances of his demise.

I have been to funerals where the people had not confessed belief in the Lord, and their funerals are very sad.

On the other hand, I have been to funerals of some very dear old saint and I felt like shouting, but not crying.

We know that dear old saint is going home to heaven to be with their Lord.

Sure, the LORD would think it precious.

The saint that dies will spend all of eternity with Him.

All the problems of life are over.

Pain and suffering and crying is over.

There shall be joy forevermore.

It will be a glorious homecoming for the saint, when death of this body occurs.

Psalm 116:16 "O LORD, truly I [am] thy servant; I [am] thy servant, [and] the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

Not merely by creation, and as obliged by providential favors; but by the grace of God, which made him a willing one.

And he was so, not nominally only, but in reality; not as those who say LORD, LORD, but do not the will of God.

Whereas he served the LORD cheerfully and willingly, in righteousness and true holiness.

And this he repeats for the confirmation of it, and to show his heartiness in the LORD's service, and his zealous attachment to him.

And which he mentions, not as though he thought his service meritorious of anything at the hand of God.

But that his being in this character was an obligation upon him to serve the LORD, and him only, and might expect his protection in it.

"And the son of thy handmaid":

His mother was also a servant of the LORD. And had trained him up in his infancy in the nurture and admonition of the LORD; so that he was inured to it early.

And could not easily depart from it.

"Thou hast loosed my bonds":

The bonds of affliction and death in which he was held.

These were loosed, being delivered from them (Psalm 116:3).

And the bonds of sin, and Satan, and the law, in whose service he had been, which was no other than a bondage.

But now was freed from the servitude and dominion of sin.

From the captivity of Satan, and the bondage of the law; and therefore, though a servant, yet the LORD's free man.

This psalmist is not only sure of his own state with the LORD, but is assured of his mother's standing with the LORD as well.

Notice, his mother was a handmaid of the LORD. He is free from the bonds of sin and death, and he knows he is free.

Verses 17-19: These verses parallel (verses 13-14).

Jonah made an almost identical statement (Jonah 2:9).

Psalm 116:17 "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD."

“The sacrifice of thanksgiving”:

Probably not a Mosaic sacrifice, but rather actual praise and thanksgiving rendered from the heart in the spirit of (Psalms 136 and 138; compare Psalms 50:23; 100:4; 119:108).

The only thing that he can do for the LORD, is to thank Him.

This to me, is saying that as long as his life continues, he will be thanking God for the wonderful work of salvation that was wrought in his life.

This thanksgiving will be part of his regular praise in prayer that he brings before God.

Psalm 116:18 "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people,"

(See notes on Psalm 116:14).

And the Targum here, as there, paraphrases the latter clause, now in the presence of all his people, thus; "I will then declare his signs (or wonders), to all his people."

The marvelous things he had done for him.

This is not to be a private thing with the psalmist.

He will do this publicly, so that all may see and benefit from this.

He is not ashamed of the LORD, and he will tell everyone of his love for Him.

Psalm 116:19 "In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."

“The LORD’S house”: Refers to:

- (1) The tabernacle in Jerusalem if written by David or before; or
- (2) The temple in Jerusalem if written by Solomon or later.

This is speaking of his place of worship.

We hear people say that they worship God alone in the woods.

This is alright, but there is a time to worship Him publicly.

Jerusalem was where the temple stood, and this would be his choice of places for him to worship the LORD.

Psalm 116 Questions

1. I love the LORD, because he hath _____ .
2. What is different in the type of love we have, and the type of love the LORD has?
3. How long did the psalmist say, that he would call on the name of the LORD?
4. The sorrows of _____ compassed me.
5. What is verse 3 describing?
6. What is the only solution to this problem?
7. When do we begin to die?
8. Who is our Deliverer?
9. Which bondage is the most urgent to be delivered from?
10. What is the one cry that brings help more quickly from God?
11. We all deserve to die for our sins we have committed. It is the _____ and _____ of God that saves us.
12. How can there be perfect peace for the believer at all times?
13. Verse 8 tells of three things we have been delivered of, what are they?
14. What does our walk in this life reveal?
15. What is verse 10 saying about his faith?
16. What had he said in his haste?
17. How can we repay God for all that He has done for us?
18. What does, I will, in verse 14, tell us?
19. How does the LORD feel about the death of the saints?
20. What does the psalmist call himself in verse 16?
21. What type of sacrifice did he offer in verse 17?
22. Where will he pay his vows?
23. What does verse 16 tell us of the psalmist's mother?
24. What was so special about Jerusalem, to the psalmist?
25. In the first verse of chapter 117, who are told to praise?