

Jesus Our Cup of Salvation, Psalm 116
Bradley Bell
November 10, 2019

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. We're nearing the end of our sermon series in the Psalms, which we've subtitled "Seeing All of Life Through the Lens of the Gospel". In light of this emphasis on our identity as Worshipers, I'd like to bring to your attention the Order of Worship for each Sunday Gathering:

- Call to Worship
- Confession
- Sermon
- Communion
- Assurance
- Benediction

This is our attempt at seeing the whole gathering through the lens of the gospel. And through all this we want—as our mission statement says—"to display Christ's glory" and love him more.

That is certainly at the heart of today's psalm, Psalm 116. I invite you to open your Bibles there with me, and you can find it on page 510 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of today's sermon is "Jesus Our Cup of Salvation".¹ The main idea is this: Loving God means lifting up the cup he has given us and asking for more. In the place of breaking the sermon down according to an outline, what I'd like to do this morning is simply walk through the psalm to show you a clear refrain that's being played over and over, and then apply that refrain to ourselves through Christ.

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Psalm 116. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

*I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.*

¹ Inspiration for the title came from Dennis Prutow, "Christ Your Cup of Salvation - Psalm 116:1-19," <http://mp3.sa-media.com/filearea/71507135642/71507135642.mp3>

² Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
“O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!”

⁵ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

⁶ The Lord preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸ For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;

⁹ I will walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁰ I believed, even when I spoke:
“I am greatly afflicted”;

¹¹ I said in my alarm,
“All mankind are liars.”

¹² What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.

¹⁶ O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷ I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the Lord

*in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord! Psalm 116*

[Leader:] *The Lord has spoken to us.* [Congregation:] *Thanks be to God!* You may be seated.

Exposition

Throughout this series we've kicked off sermons with a cultural liturgy, something through which we interpret life, like looking through the lens of a pair of glasses. Today's is represented by a phrase that will be familiar to parents in the room: "More 'pease". It's what children often learn to say as they lift up their cup to ask for more of whatever was in it. It doesn't matter if they've dumped the contents on the floor or basted their head in it or swallowed it all in one gulp. Without any shame, they lift up their cup and ask for more. Eventually, however, they begin to learn there are limits to asking for more—such as "No, you can't have all ten suckers that you got at Antioch today, you can only have one." And even though such human limitations and boundaries are important to learn, we ultimately end up projecting those limitations on God.

The contrasting lens of Psalm 116 seeks to return us to the posture of the expectant child, asking without shame, "More pease',"—not from man, but from God. The psalmist takes us on a very personal journey of how this was corrected in him, which is ironic because we don't know exactly who the author is or what the precise circumstances were. And what makes that even more ironic is that Psalms 113-118 make up what is called the Hallel, the songs that were sang by God's Old Testament people throughout the Passover meal—that is, the meal and festival in which they celebrated God's rescue of them from slavery in Egypt. That means Jesus would have sang this with his disciples at the Last Supper. So, even though we might approach this psalm on the basis of our own personal experiences that are similar to the psalmist's (which is our tendency when reading the psalms, right?), it also has a much fuller application for us through the Person of Jesus Christ.²

We begin in verses 1-4, not just because they come first, but because they really sum up the entire psalm; and also because they serve as the place from which we get the refrain that will play over and over. First we read simply,

² Charles H. Spurgeon, "Psalm 116," *The Treasury of David*, <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/treasury/ps116.htm>

I love the Lord, Psalm 116:1a

The thing is, there's actually nothing simple about the sentiment behind these words. It's the very thing that leads the author to write a psalm in the first place. Watch a man of only grunts fall in love and see if he won't at some take up a pen in poem or song or letter to praise the object of his affection. As a human who is by nature repelled at the love of God³ and cannot declare him Lord without his help⁴, what is it that has so moved the psalmist that he would pour out his heart in this way? He's about to tell us, continuing in verse 1:

*I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy. Psalm 116:1*

He's drawing on a past experience to make a present application—another way it could be translated is “he *hears* my voice”. It's like, “Because he heard me *then*, I believe he will also *now*.”⁵ This is the intended result of our prayers being directed toward God—that as he answers them, our love for him and our expectation of him will be magnified.⁶

But from what was the psalmist pleading for mercy? Skip down to verses 3-4:

³ *The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.*
⁴ *Then I called on the name of the Lord:
“O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!” Psalm 116:3-4*

Again, we don't know exactly what had happened, but the poetic description is pretty gruesome. Death and Sheol, the Old Testament term for the place of the dead, had aggressively caught him and was tightening its grip around his throat. This isn't “I woke up on the wrong side of the bed”; it's “I woke up to the grim reaper standing over me”. And thus he suffered distress and anguish, which means he came to the end of himself

³ Romans 3:10-11; 1 Corinthians 2:14

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:3

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 443

⁶ Spurgeon, “Psalm 116”; John 15:7, 11

in total despair. Ex. python. He had lost all hope, and that's the crucial moment in which he called on the name of the Lord.⁷

Apparently, that's also the crucial moment in which the Lord heard his cry and answered with mercy; which fits perfectly with God's character as described by the prophet Isaiah, "the Lord longs to be gracious to you...How gracious he will be *when you cry for help!* As soon as he hears, he will answer you."⁸ The surprising thing is not that the Lord responded; it's that we wait that long to cry for help. In an age when everyone seems to be clamoring to make their voice known and heard, crying out to gain listeners and followers and admirers, what we really long for is being offered to us: an ear in the heavens, an audience of the God of the universe.

Here is where the psalmist gains his ultimate lesson and application (moving back to verse 2):

*² Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live. Psalm 116:2*

The image here, as one preacher puts it, is like "a tender physician or loving friend leaning over a sick man whose voice is faint and scarcely audible, so as to catch every accent and whisper."⁹ Except magnify that by the reality that God is leaning down all the way from heaven—and it leads us to say with King David, "what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"¹⁰ God, *you* care for *me*? When I'm at the end of myself and finally I cry out, when "nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling," *you* are delighted to answer *me*? As it says in verse 15, my death is precious in your sight?

"If that's the case," says the psalmist, "then I will call on you as long as I live." It's like the stray dog who's starving and alone, driven off at every turn, but when he's offered the first open hand and a few kibbles—what happens?—with all his heart he's found a new master. That's why we drive off stray dogs instead of feed them, right? You'll end up with a new pet. Not so with God. When we come to him realizing we're dead dogs without him, he welcomes us as long as we live.

⁷ Kidner, 443

⁸ Isaiah 30:18-19, NIV

⁹ Spurgeon, "Psalm 116"

¹⁰ Psalm 8:4

And so there it is in verses 1-4, the refrain of the psalm, and what is a refrain of life with God. You might also think of it like a rollercoaster, especially the massive drop where your stomach lifts into your throat, that then goes straight into a loopy-loop:



Now let's see how that refrain continues in the rest of the psalm. Read with me in verses 10-11:

¹⁰ *I believed, even when I spoke:
"I am greatly afflicted";*
¹¹ *I said in my alarm [or haste],
"All mankind are liars." Psalm 116:10-11*

What we see here is that even in the loss of faith in his own resources, the psalmist was striving for faith in God's. It's like the words we sang earlier, "When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, abide with me".¹¹ What a fitting name for God: Help of the helpless. And yet what's also reflected here is the complexity of such a fight to trust the Lord. In the midst of his pain the psalmist hastily lost trust in all others. This may tell us something of the circumstances, that perhaps it wasn't just a near-death experience, but the death-like state of being defamed in character, or betrayed by a friend, or depressed with great sorrows. Moses¹², David¹³, Elijah¹⁴—there are many throughout the Bible, in fact, who at some point believed they were on the brink of death from experiences other than physical illness.¹⁵ This is normal human experience; that's why there's a refrain here, which continues in v. 5,

¹¹ Henry Francis Lyte, "Abide With Me," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5KsKsEu0v0>; Kidner, 444-445

¹² Numbers 11:10-15

¹³ 2 Samuel 12:16-18

¹⁴ 1 Kings 19:1-4

¹⁵ Spurgeon, "Psalm 116"

⁵ *Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.* [This is reflective of the description God gives of himself throughout the Old Testament; it's like a chorus: "the Lord...merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"¹⁶—can't distinguish reality in your pain? Look to his character that doesn't change; character that (v. 6)...] ⁶ *The Lord preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.* [The Lord's character orients his grace and mercy not toward the healthy, but the sick, the simple, the lowly.¹⁷ Here's why we're often slow to cry out—we're focused on *our* character instead of *his*, trying to get ourselves put together before we go to him, missing that it's when we're brought low, hanging by a thread, that he is mighty to save.¹⁸ If we would but go to him in our need, he would answer us, and we would be able to say from v. 7,] ⁷ *Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.* Psalm 116:5-7

The Lord was not a grudging provider—'Ugh, the kid wants more again.'¹⁹ No, the lifted cup is gladly filled.

⁸ *For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;*
⁹ *I will walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.* Psalm 116:8-9

The psalmist's whole person is rescued—the heart, the head, the hands and feet. This the reward of those who have learned to call on the name of the Lord through Jesus Christ:

- Dying body—given victory²⁰
- Defamed character—vindicated forever²¹
- Betrayed friendship—restored a hundredfold²²
- Depressed spirit—comforted, as with all these things, by the Lord himself.²³

¹⁶ Exodus 34:6

¹⁷ Mark 2:17

¹⁸ Spurgeon, "Psalm 116"

¹⁹ Spurgeon, "Psalm 116"

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

²¹ 1 Peter 2:21-23

²² Matthew 19:29

²³ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Spurgeon, "Psalm 116"

In light of all this the psalmist rightly bursts out in v. 12,

¹² *What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits to me?* [This is the natural response to grace. But as one pastor says, “[This verse] makes me nervous. Payback can so easily imply that grace is like a mortgage. It’s really generous, but you have to pay it back.”²⁴ And I have sometimes seen this at play even in the most zealous Christians, especially missionaries. After a true encounter of God’s grace, their heart bursts with the question, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” But their answer deep down is entangled with the desire to pay back the Lord. This is what makes for lone rangers set on single-handedly changing the neighborhood or saving the nations. But instead, the most appropriate response to grace is] ¹³ *I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,*
¹⁴ *I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people. Psalm 116:12-14*

This is not an act of paying back—it’s actually the opposite. The cup of salvation has already been poured for the psalmist, and so his only response is to lift it up again and call on the name of the Lord—“More ‘pease!” His vows are summed up in this: “I will call on the Lord as long as I live,” and I will do so in the presence of his people.²⁵ When the love of God is magnified in our hearts, it always draws us *into* the community of God’s people, just as we read in Psalm 34: “Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”²⁶ It’s so significant that the psalmist repeats it, in v. 18:

¹⁸ *I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people,*
¹⁹ *in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.*
Praise the Lord! Psalm 116:18-19

One scholar sums it up well: “the intensely personal faith and love which mark this psalm are not in competition with the public, formal and localized expressions of [it]. This flame is not withdrawn, to burn alone. Placed in the *midst*, it will kindle others, and

²⁴ John Piper, “How to Repay God,” *Desiring God*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-repay-god>

²⁵ Piper, “How to Repay God”; Spurgeon, “Psalm 116”; Kidner, 445-446

²⁶ Psalm 34:3

blaze all the longer and better for it.”²⁷ The stray dog has found a new master, and with him, a home and a family.

And so the psalmist’s concluding words fit perfectly with his opening words. The hashtag of the heart that beats out “I love the Lord” is simply and yet profoundly this: “Praise the Lord!”

Conclusion

As we mentioned at the beginning of today’s sermon, it’s tempting to apply this psalm primarily on the basis of our own personal experiences. But what we’ve been learning throughout this series and especially in the Worshiper trainings is the way to the fullest understanding of Scripture is through the lens of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Not only did Jesus sing this psalm with his disciples as they celebrated the Passover one last time, but think about how he embodied the message of Psalm 116. Remember the refrain?



How did Jesus lose all hope and call on the name of the Lord? First we must understand that before Jesus was even born he was described by the prophet Isaiah as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”²⁸—not just in his crucifixion, but throughout his life. And yet he lived that life of sorrows not in his own strength, but constantly hoping in God the Father.²⁹ Constantly calling on the name of the Lord as the snares of death continually sought his life—hunted from the womb and hunted as a child and hunted as a man. I mean, who else could say with greater truth, “I am greatly afflicted,” and “All mankind are liars,” as he stood deserted by the friends he loved and the

²⁷ Kidner, 446

²⁸ Isaiah 53:3

²⁹ John 5:19

multitudes he taught and the sick he healed? Consider him who called on the Lord from the garden, “let this cup pass from me,”—and the answer from Psalm 75 was “in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and [for the salvation of] the wicked of the earth [you] shall drain it down to the dregs.”³⁰ Who among us could taste such despair and yet pray, “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption”³¹? Truly, it is Jesus Christ above all who can say with the psalmist, “I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!’”

And here comes the refrain again:



How can it be said of Jesus that the Lord heard and rescued him? Well, you might think, “I wouldn't go quite so far as to say that Jesus Christ was “rescued”—he *did* die on a cross after all.” But the author of Hebrews tells us that “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”³² Let's put this in perspective: if we cry out to God and he doesn't rescue us according to our definition of rescue, we doubt him; or even if he does, we soon forget. But here is Jesus—*all hope lost*—and still he hopes against hope.³³ Job may have said it, but to whom more than Jesus Christ belongs the phrase, “Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him”³⁴? So how precious in the sight of the Lord was the death of his Son? And how pleased was the Lord to rescue him, although the body was dead because of sin, the spirit was life because of righteousness³⁵; although the pangs of death laid hold of him, as the author of Acts tells us, “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not

³⁰ Psalm 75:8

³¹ Psalm 13:10

³² Hebrews 5:7

³³ Romans 4:18

³⁴ Job 13:15

³⁵ Romans 8:10

possible for him to be held by it.”³⁶ And with greater meaning than the psalmist ever dreamed, out of the tomb Jesus Christ walked before the Lord and into the land of the living.

Let us return to the refrain one more time:



How would Jesus become one who calls on the name of the Lord as long as he lives? Well, consider him who did not immediately fly from the tomb to the throne to hoard his equality with God, but instead has a heart bursting with this question: “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” The answer? “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows in the presence of all his people.” In other words, ‘I will appear to my disciples, and send them; I will ascend to the Father, and send the Spirit. As I vowed to God before the foundation of the earth, I will lift up this cup to the ends of the earth, until I have gathered a “people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation”³⁷. And I will keep this cup lifted until I drink it anew in the Father’s kingdom³⁸ in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord.’ So it is through you that Jesus Christ calls on the name of the Lord. It is through you that his love for the Lord is magnified today.³⁹

You see, this isn’t just preacher-talk about how we see Jesus in Psalm 116. No, this is seeing all of Scripture through the lens of the gospel. Jesus drank the bitter cup of God’s wrath so that you could drink the sacred cup of God’s grace. Not so that you could call on another. Not so that you could spend your days trying to repay him. He fulfilled every drop of this psalm so that *you could too*; so that as long as you live, you

³⁶ Acts 2:24

³⁷ Revelation 5:9

³⁸ Matthew 26:29

³⁹ This Christological conclusion is shaped primarily by Spurgeon, “Psalm 116”

can once again be like the child who looks to the Father without hesitation and says, "More 'pease!" Loving him by lifting up the cup he has given us and asking for more.

The same cup that Jesus sang about with his disciples on the night that he was betrayed, taking a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, breaking it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ is our cup of salvation.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

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