Psalm 116: I Love The Lord

Prepared by Nathan L Morrison for Sunday November 26th, 2023

Text: Psalm 116 Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:18-21

### Intro

1. As Americans, this past week we celebrated Thanksgiving.
2. It has been said numerous times that even though this day is set apart once a year, we are to give thanks to God for all things at all times!
   1. **I Thessalonians 5:18:** “…in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”
   2. **Ephesians 5:18-21:** “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ***always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father***; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”
3. This gratitude that we are to feel for all things at all times is not an attitude of “What can I get out of it?” but of genuine thanks to God.
   1. This was the pagan way of thinking.
   2. Pagan worship was and is still self-centered: The ancient pagan practice of ***appeasement.***
   3. Pagans were concerned only with keeping the gods happy; keeping them appeased. So, from time to time, the pagans would make some sort of an offering. But the whole idea behind their worship was to ensure future blessings; it was a “what’s in it for me” religion, the attitude of “What can I get out of it?”
   4. Christianity is not a “what’s in it for me” religion. The Scriptures speak of thanksgiving as the sincere overflow of a heart of gratitude for all that God has given to us.
   5. **Appeasement** looks forward to what I may get in the future; **Gratitude** says Thanks for what I have been given.
   6. Thanksgiving is not at all self-centered; it is intended to be completely God-centered!
4. This morning, I want us to take a look at Psalm 116.
   1. We don’t know who the author of this particular psalm was.
   2. Whoever it was, it was a man whom God had taken care of through some difficult times.
   3. As he reflected on what God had done for him, he poured out his heart in thanksgiving.
5. Psalm 116 was one of six psalms that the Jews sang every year at the Passover meal.
   1. In fact, they still do as it is observed today!
   2. First they sing Psalms 113, 114, and 115. Then they eat!
   3. Then they lean back in their chairs, and relax, and talk about the good old days when God delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. They then sing Psalm 116: “I love the Lord.”
6. Psalm 116 actually has two parts:
   1. In the first half, the psalmist pours out his praise as he tells about the love of God and lists the many ways that God has blessed him.
   2. Then, in the second half, the psalmist tells how he plans to respond to God’s blessings.
7. Let the Psalmist remind us to “give thanks” to the Lord and recount the reasons we love Him!

#### **The Psalmist Counts the Ways**

* 1. Psalm 116 begins with the words “I love the Lord because…”
     1. In the 19th century, there was a young English girl, Elizabeth Barrett (1806-1861), who suffered a spinal injury at the age of 15 which left her a semi-invalid for many years afterward.
     2. There was a man whom she loved very deeply and eventually married — Robert Browning.
     3. Her love for him was beautifully expressed in her work *“Sonnets From the Portuguese”* (1845)
     4. Now, that title may not sound familiar to you, but I think that the words which she wrote will sound familiar, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways…”
     5. Then she went on to describe the depth of her love for her husband. <https://englishhistory.net/poets/elizabeth-barrett-browning/>
  2. That’s what the Psalmist does here. Why does he love the Lord? Let him (and us) count the ways!

#### I Love The Lord, Because…

* 1. **Because God heard him (Psalm 116:1-2) --** “I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.”
     1. What’s he saying? He’s saying, “When I speak, God listens. God pays attention to what I have to say.”
     2. The best way I can relate to that is as a father:
        1. I can be very focused when working or doing any task. I’m also good at multi-tasking but I can get laser focused.
        2. As it happens at home, one of my children would try to get my attention for one thing or another. Unfortunately, sometimes I would say, “Uh, huh, yeah, that’s real nice.”
        3. I tried not to do that, but I know it still happened from time to time.
     3. The Psalmist says here that it’s not like that with God: He hears our voice. He inclines His ear to our prayers. He stops what He’s doing and He pays attention to us.
     4. The apostle Peter wrote: “FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL” **(I Peter 3:12)** – He quotes from Psalm 34:15-16
     5. The apostle John put it this way: “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” **(I John 5:14-15).**
     6. Giving thanks to God should begin with the realization that God has heard our many prayers, and God has answered those prayers.
  2. **Because God rescued him (Psalm 116:3-6, 8) --** “The cords of death encompassed me And the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the LORD: ‘O LORD, I beseech You, save my life!’ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate. The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.…. For You have rescued my soul from death, My eyes from tears, My feet from stumbling.”
     1. We don’t know for sure who wrote this psalm, but it’s certainly easy to picture David as the author perhaps after being rescued from King Saul.
        1. Whoever the Psalmist is, he remembers the problems that he’s had in the past.
        2. He’s had some terribly painful experiences.
        3. And he did what most of us would do under similar circumstances — he prayed to God. He asked God to save him.
     2. And his prayers were answered!
        1. God delivered him. Just like He did the Israelites in Egypt.
        2. In **Exodus 3:7-8,** God said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey …”
     3. The Psalmist realizes that God did the same thing for him.
        1. God delivered him. God rescued him. God took care of him.
        2. So he gives God the credit and says he loves the Lord for His care.
        3. He firmly believes that God stepped into the picture and snatched him from the jaws of death, and he’s very thankful – As we ought to be as well!
  3. **Because God had richly blessed him (Psalm 116:7) --** “Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.”
     1. God has “dealt bountifully.” The idea is that God has piled gift after gift upon us.
     2. We often sing the song *Count Your Many Blessings (Hymn #384 in Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs)*. And the Psalmist here is doing just that; he’s reflecting on all the things that God has done for him. And we need to learn to do the same thing; “Count your many blessings, name them one by one!”
        1. **Ephesians 3:20:** Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.
        2. “Far more abundantly” is a phrase in the Greek that means, “Super Abundant.” Gift after gift, as the Hebrew word “bountifully” means.
     3. God has blessed us so bountifully that sometimes it makes it difficult for us to be truly thankful: Because when you receive gifts on a regular basis, it’s easy to get to the point where we come to expect it, to take it for granted.
     4. This is the “entitlement mindset” that has embedded itself in American & Western society, in general, at almost every level. We have been blessed to live in a land of plenty. The blessings that we enjoy in this country stagger the imagination. But, as a result, there is a tendency for us all to expect the blessings we have, so that we become complacent, and we don’t give thanks to God for what we enjoy.
        1. Going to other countries where the people don’t have our freedoms and “bounty” puts it in perspective.
        2. Going to Tanzania really opened my eyes and I was glad I could share that experience with Becky on my 2nd trip.
        3. I know for me, who already thought I was thankful, it made me ***more*** thankful to God!
     5. We read in I Kings 3-11 about King Solomon, the richest man in all the world.
        1. Solomon had an annual income of about $530 million dollars a year.
        2. We hear that and we think, “Wouldn’t that be nice! I wish I had what Solomon did.”
        3. But, for all the gold Solomon collected, he never had electricity in his home, or running water.
        4. He didn’t own an air conditioner.
        5. He never used a flushing toilet or took a hot shower (without someone constantly refreshing and pouring over him).
        6. He never drove in an automobile, nor traveled across the world in an airplane.
        7. He may have never tasted a banana or a home-baked chocolate chip cookie.
        8. When Solomon got a cold, he couldn’t run down to the store and pick up a bottle of Nyquil to help him sleep better.
        9. In almost every way I can think of, I have more luxuries surrounding me, things which I consider very ordinary, than Solomon the richest man in the world ever even dreamed of having!
        10. Jesus said of Solomon’s splendor and clothing, “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these” (Matthew 6:28-29).
  4. When we consider the many blessings that we have, we should be driven to our knees in thanksgiving: “Count your many blessings, name them one by one!”

#### **The Psalmist’s Response to God (Psalm 116:12-19)**

* 1. **Expressing thanks (Psalm 116:12-13, 17) --** “What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation And call upon the name of the LORD… To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, And call upon the name of the LORD.”
     1. The Psalmist simply can’t contain his desire to express his thanks to God.
     2. Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was a self-proclaimed atheist who rejected the idea of a personal God, but she also acknowledged the existence of a natural order and a moral law that governed the universe.
     3. James Freeman Clarke was a Unitarian minister and friend of Martineau, who wrote a biography of her in 1877, a year after her death. In his book, *Nineteenth Century Questions* (1897), he recounts a conversation he had with Martineau in 1855, when they were both visiting Niagara Falls. He writes:
        1. “We were standing together on the bridge which crosses the rapids above the Falls. It was a bright October morning. The sun shone on the brilliant foliage of the trees, and on the swift current of the river. The air was full of life and exhilaration. I said to her, “This is a glorious day.” She replied, “Yes, it is a day to make one grateful.” I said, “To whom are you grateful?” She answered, “To the Power which has caused this beauty and this joy.” p. 282.
     4. We see it all the time in entertainment and various media: people talk about being thankful but very seldom does anybody say they are giving thanks to God, they just say in a generic way, “I’m thankful.”
        1. But what most people fail to realize is that you can’t just “be thankful;” you have to be thankful to someone.
        2. There is a Giver of all good things! (James 1:17) and it is God!
     5. We’re reminded of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19 who were healed by Jesus and how only one of them bothered to come back to Jesus and thank Him.
        1. We wonder how anybody could receive such a wonderful blessing and not give thanks for it, but most of us only have to look at ourselves to understand how that could happen.
        2. How often do we fail to express our appreciation and gratitude to God?
     6. **Ephesians 5:20:** “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”
        1. And that’s not always easy to do. We know we should thank God for the good things. But for everything?
        2. Both the pleasant and unpleasant things?
        3. Yes, give thanks to God “always” for the good days and even the bad days, the fun days and the tough days.
     7. As we mature in our Christianity, we learn to thank God even for things that aren’t very pleasant because we have a faith that’s strong enough to believe that “all things” truly will “work together for good” (Romans 8:28).
     8. To thank God for everything means:
        1. To give thanks for both the big things and the little things.
        2. Things like the forgiveness of our sins.
        3. Like warm clothing and good food. (for running water, electricity, home-baked chocolate chip cookies)
        4. The love of our family.
        5. The health that we enjoy.
  2. **Dedicating his life to God (Psalms 116:14, 18-19) --** “I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people... I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!”
     1. Thanksgiving requires a person to fulfill his responsibility to God.
        1. Those of us who are Christians made a vow to God long ago, a promise that we would put Him first in our lives, that we would serve with all our Heart, Soul, Mind & Strength **(Mark 12:30).**
        2. If we’re truly thankful, we will make every effort to fulfill that vow before the Lord.
        3. In fact, total, unconditional surrender to God is the highest form of thanksgiving.
     2. Thanksgiving is not merely saying something nice to God, or occasionally treating Him with courtesy and respect.
     3. It is not just setting aside a certain day out of the year when we eat more than usual and watch a parade or a football game (or a dog show) — and somewhere along the line we say, “Thanks” to God for the blessings of the past year — and then put Him back on the shelf until the same time next year.
     4. Rather, as someone has put it, thanksgiving is “the habitual recognition of life as a great obligation,” and, we are to have an “Attitude of Gratitude.”
     5. We as Christians ought to be aware more than anyone else of the importance of thanking God through the way that we live.
     6. **I Corinthians 6:19-20:** As Paul reminds us, *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price.”* Then he continues with the only logical conclusion: *“therefore glorify God in your body.”*
     7. There is no such thing as real thanksgiving without dedicated living.
     8. In fact, thanksgiving isn’t complete unless it leads to “thanksLIVING.”
  3. It’s not enough to merely offer the praise of our lips – there ought to also be the praise of our lives.

## Conclusion

1. When things are going good it is easy to forget to be thankful to God, and easy to think we did that.
2. When things are going bad it is easy to forget to be thankful to God, because we are focused on ourselves!
3. It is hard to give thanks if we are focused on “Self” and given over to grumbling and complaining.
   1. **Philippians 2:14:** Do all things without grumbling or disputing.
   2. Complaining is the archenemy of thanksgiving.
   3. The two simply cannot co-exist in the same heart.
   4. There’s a quote that I saw years ago that was being passed around on Facebook — “November is the month where people who have complained on Facebook for the past 11 months become thankful for 30 days.”
4. **Week-long NO Complaining Challenge:** 
   1. I want to give you a challenge this morning– a challenge to quit complaining for one week.
   2. Just try it.
   3. This week, whenever you feel tempted to complain or grumble about something, instead of complaining, thank God.
   4. Find something positive about that situation or day and praise God and give Him thanks.
   5. It will change your life!
5. **Ephesians 5:20:** “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”
   1. The key word there is “always.”
   2. Not just on Thanksgiving. Not just on Sundays. Every day.
   3. God is good (All the time)
   4. All the time (God is good)
6. Psalm 116 reminds us of the fact that thanksgiving to God is important for each and every one of us.
7. Day by day, may we remember how richly God has blessed each of us, and may we daily express our thanks to Him for His goodness, and may we in response dedicate our lives to the One who gave His all for us.
8. Let us, like the Psalmist, say, “I love the Lord. Let me count the ways!”
9. If you are not a Christian, you need to be. Repent and be baptized into His name!
10. If a Christian in error, don’t wait till it’s eternally too late. Repent and be renewed!
11. Whatever your requests, let them be made known ***NOW*** while we stand & sing!