

## **The bountiful favours of God**

Psalm 116

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Psalm 116, reading from verse number one:

I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol lay hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!" Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted." I said in my haste, "All men are liars." What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now 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! Amen.

Let us come before the Lord in prayer. Lord, we ask that You would send Your Holy Spirit to help us praise the Lord this day, for You are worthy of all honor, praise, and glory. And we come before You, asking that You would open the eyes of our understanding and open our ears that we might behold wondrous things out of Your law. So, Lord, we come before You now, asking that You would send grace, strength, and comfort in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this psalm is a beautiful psalm. It's most known for its "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints," a favorite funeral verse of many Christians. And fair enough, it is a precious passage indeed. But this psalm particularly concerns all the deliverances and the mercies of the Lord.

In this psalm, the psalmist particularly is explaining to us how he has been met with trouble. And then, in the light of such trouble and afflictions, there has been deliverance. And this is essentially the theme of what he's saying here. And as he muses and thinks upon all these great deliverances that God has bestowed upon him and shown him, he basically concludes some things about God.

And look with me in verse number five. He concludes some things about God. He says in verse number five, "Gracious is the Lord, righteous; yes, our God is merciful." He declares that the Lord is a merciful God and a gracious God, a God who delivers and preserves His people, as he says in the following verse there. But the psalmist here is reflecting, and you could just imagine him just writing and reflecting on these great deliverances of God in light of all his dangers.

But in verse number 12, it's almost as if the psalmist reaches a peak, a sort of crescendo in his reflection. And his heart can no longer contain it as he's meditating upon the deliverances and the goodness and the graciousness of a merciful God. He says in verse number 12, "What shall I render unto the Lord? What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" He's taken up. He's taken up by the goodness and graciousness of his God. He sees God as a great benefactor. He says, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" He sees God as this gracious God, full of gifts, full of blessings, full of mercies. And he sees God in such a way as a God that bestows His favor upon His people. He shows generosity. He shows liberality. As James says in James 1:16, "Every good and perfect gift comes from above." It's almost as if he's seeing this and he acknowledges this, and he looks at the Lord as this one who bestows great benefits.

And seeing God as the God of great benefits, he doesn't only just see Him in that general sense, but he gets a little bit more particular. He recognizes that God's benefits toward him are not singular but manifold. They are plenteous. Look what he says in verse 12: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all?" And then he says, "His benefits," plural, "unto me." He's not just musing upon one or two here or there. He is recognizing that this God is bountiful in mercy. Look what he says there in verse number seven: "Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." Dealt with you in generosity, in liberality. He recognizes that these deliverances are not only numerous and plenteous but he recognizes that God's benefits towards him are also various in type.

He's not just thinking of deliverances from death. Look at verse number eight, what he says: "For You have delivered my soul from death, but it doesn't end there. He says, "You have delivered my eyes from tears, and You

have delivered my feet from falling." You see, God's gracious providences to the psalmist went more than just preserving him from death. The Lord cared and bestowed His mercy on even keeping his eyes from tears, even keeping his feet from falling. He recognizes that God's providence was not only numerous but various in type.

So when he came face to face with death, as he did, it was there that he saw the Lord rescue him. When he came face to face with trouble and things that would overwhelm him with much sorrow, it was there that the Lord intervened and delivered him and perhaps even consoled him and comforted him. And as he saw his life in slippery places and saw his life somewhat in uncertain places, it was there that he felt the hand of the Lord keeping his feet from falling as he climbed up those places of danger and great difficulty.

And he recognizes that all these benefits that have been bestowed upon him is not anything due to what's in him but it is due to something that is in God. And he says that in verse number five: "Gracious is the Lord and merciful." He recognizes that he is one who is undeserving. He is a recipient of grace. He is receiving mercy. He is one to whom the Lord is dealing with him bountifully, in generosity. He sees himself as a recipient of the benefits of God, as a beneficiary to the benefactor. God is bestowing upon him good things, gracious things, because He is gracious, because He is merciful, because He deals with us in generosity. He did not see himself as being deserving of these benefits.

And as one indebted to God, reflecting upon such of the grace that he received, in verse number 12, he cannot but cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" What can I give back to the Lord? What can I return to the Lord? He is musing and thinking and dwelling upon such providences and deliverances of God, the graciousness of God, the mercifulness of God. And he steps back for a moment, and in the middle of the psalm, he says, "What can I give back to you, O Lord, for all Your benefits toward me?"

His heart is overwhelmed. His heart is rejoicing in the goodness of God, and he feels indebted to God. He feels like, "What can I give back to Him? How can I respond?" Now, the important thing to understand is that the psalmist is not teaching us here that there is a way in which we can pay back God. He's not teaching us to exact the blessings that God has given to you and try and, in everything you do, try and pay Him back so that, at the end of the day, the ledger will be okay, the accounting will be done, and you owe nothing to God, and so He'll accept you on the final day. That is not what he's referring to.

You see, this is not the expression of a man that's trying to make calcula-

tions as an accountant and trying to reconcile the books before God. This is a man that has received mercy. This is a man that has received grace, and his response is showing that in his heart, there is a desire to repay, not in the sense of exact payment, but to repay in the sense of, "How can I respond? What is a fitting response?" Not an exact payment, not an equal payment, but a fitting response because nothing can equate to the deliverances of God.

In fact, think about it for a moment. Imagine the psalmist said, "What can I give back to the Lord? Okay, well, He's delivered my soul from death. Now, how many lifetimes do you have to give back to God for all the times that He's delivered your soul from death?" It's impossible. You've only got one life to give Him, but He saved your soul from death time and time and time again. And that's just life. What about my eyes from tears? What about my feet from falling?

And so, he's not simply saying here, "Look, we've got to work out a way to pay God," as much of religion today is. It's not, "I must do these things in order to earn the favor of God." The psalmist is not thinking that way. He's thinking, "I have received mercy and deliverance that I do not deserve. What is a fitting response to such love? What is a fitting response to such mercy?" That's his attitude. That should be, of course, our attitude, lest we offend God and think that there is some way that we can match up to what He gives.

So the question is not one of technical accounting, but one that results from his reflection. Remember that he's reflecting, and it's more of an emotional response rather than it being a technical calculation here. He is moved in his heart. The reflections have caused his heart to rise with joy and praise, and just saying, "God, what can I give back to You? Just something. Just something. Can I give You something? I want to bless and praise Your name." And so, he gives two fitting responses in the passage here, verse 13 and 14, that we should also consider briefly.

In verse number 13, he says, "I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord." And so, the psalmist says here, "I'm going to take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord." That, as we will look at, is what I would call worshipful thanksgiving. Now, the cup of salvation only appears once in the entire scripture, this phrase, "the cup of salvation." And when that's the case, a lot of commentators have different views on that. Obviously, there's not much light shed on it. But the idea of the cup of salvation could mean a few different things. And this is, but ultimately, it will boil down to one thing as we look at it. But the cup of salvation could refer to the drink offerings that were made. That would be a cup that would be poured out in thanksgiving for the salvation that

the Lord has wrought for His people, as Numbers 15 talks about the drink offerings. Some have thought it was referring to that.

Others have thought about this as a cup that was present in the meals of a family or in a feast, where the head of the household would take the cup, as it were, of deliverances or the cup of salvation, a cup of thanksgiving, and he would bless the Lord in the presence of his family as he drank the cup at the end of the meal. But others have yet said that this is metaphorical, just like Jesus, "Nevertheless, let not My will be done; let this cup pass from Me." There was no particular cup in a physical offering sense, but there was a cup, a metaphorical cup, a portion, as it were, a lot that Jesus was wrestling with there in the garden. "Let this cup pass from Me." But thank God that He drank it to the glory of God and to the salvation of His people.

But we are here considering today, what is this cup? Well, at the very least, we can understand that it is a cup of thanksgiving. And the metaphorical explanation brings out the heart of it anyway, and that is this: It is what the psalmist may be saying here is simply this, that, "God, You have rendered so much toward me, so what I'm going to do is take up the cup of salvation. I am going to embrace all Your deliverances, as it were, and drink them up, as it were. I'm going to receive them into my heart, receive them in praise and thanksgiving to You." Because it goes on to say, "and call upon the name of the Lord."

Now, whether you look at this as regarding the physical cup or not, or an offering, it's all the same in this sense that all the offerings were thanks and praise to God. This is the idea: "I will take up the cup of salvation, the Lord's deliverances," and he says, "I will call upon the name of the Lord." This is a fitting response. "I will call on the name of the Lord." And the word "calling on the name of the Lord" is not only the idea of crying out to God for help, although the scripture does refer to calling on the name of the Lord in that way many times, as it even does in this psalm. But if you remember back in the book of Genesis, when Cain was born and the offspring of Cain was a corrupted offspring and a wicked offspring. But then Adam and Eve had Seth, and Seth had Enosh, and the Bible says, "and then men began to call upon the name of the Lord."

Calling upon the name of the Lord has the idea of worshipping God. You see, Abraham, whenever he moved from place to place, it says he built an altar and he called on the name of the Lord. It is not necessarily that he's calling particularly for some particular help, although those who call on the name of the Lord do call for help. But the idea is of worship, the idea is of fellowship, and the idea is of this relationship to God that he's calling on His name, that he's beseeching Him, he's invoking God, he is recogniz-

ing God. And what the psalmist is essentially saying here is that a fitting response to our great deliverances or to the great benefits bestowed upon me is this: It is to embrace the salvations of God. This is in the plural, the cup of salvation, the deliverances of God, and to go and worship Him. Essentially, what he's saying is worshipful thanksgiving is a proper response to God's deliverances.

But then, secondly, he also mentions here in verse 14, he says, "I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people." So firstly, he says, "I'm going to take this cup and worship God with thanksgiving." But beyond that, he says, "I am going to deliberately obey God. I will pay my vows. I will pay them, and I'll pay them unashamedly, even as it were in the presence of all the Lord's people." Perhaps even referring to the offerings he had promised to offer something to the Lord, and he came before the Lord, even in the temple, and offered it to the Lord even in the presence of all God's people. And so, these are two fitting responses to God's deliverance.

But what does this mean for us? How does this relate to us? You see, here the psalmist has been reflecting on all his deliverances that the Lord has bestowed upon him, and he cries out, "What shall I render, and what shall I give back to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" And he gives two fitting responses. But before we examine ourselves as to whether or not we fulfill the same responses or respond in the same way, we have to first ask ourselves, do we feel what the psalmist feels? Because that's where it begins. Do we feel what the psalmist feels? Have we ever felt the way that the psalmist has felt? Have we ever stopped and reflected upon the blessings that God has bestowed upon us? Have we ever thought that they are so numerous? Have we ever thought that they are so various? Have we ever looked upon our lives and remembered that we have been delivered from death, that our feet have been delivered from falling, and that our eyes have been delivered from sorrows?

You see, it was these very thoughts that led the psalmist to feel what he felt. It was these very things that caused him to ask the question, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" And my friends, I'm simply saying to you, brothers and sisters in Christ, that is this: that our gratitude toward God is subject to our understanding of His grace. It is those who show gratitude most to God that understand the depth of His grace best. It is when you and I comprehend the mercies of a gracious and loving God that our hearts are fit for worship, that our hearts are fit for praise.

Why don't we show or why don't we ask, as it were, that question more often in our lives? Why is it that many of God's people don't feel that way day to day in their relationship to the Lord? Well, it's simple. It's an issue of

our meditations. It's an issue of our mind. It's an issue of our hearts. You see, for many of God's people, we allow our lives to be filled with discontent. As we consider our lives, we don't consider them often enough in light of the great benefits of God. We usually look at our lives in such a way of what we don't have rather than what we do have. Men usually look at things in life that of what they have. They usually pay more attention to what they are lacking rather than what they have received. This is a problem with men's heart, is it not? And it's a problem with our hearts even after we have been regenerated and saved by the mercy of God.

We must continue to remind ourselves of the blessings that God has bestowed upon us, lest we fall into a state of discontent. This discontent can lead to an attitude of entitlement, where we begin to think that life is not giving us what we deserve. We may start to believe that we deserve a better car, a better house, better clothes, and a better living condition. We may even think that we deserve not to be in pain or to go through any suffering. As our minds become steeped in this sense of entitlement, it's easy to lose sight of the benefits that God has bestowed upon us.

I'm sure if we sat down with the psalmist and asked him about all the bad things that have happened in his life, he could have made a psalm longer than Psalm 116 about all the bad things that have happened. But he chose to reflect and meditate on the benefits and blessings, not on what he did not have and the sorrows. We often don't praise God as we should because of our discontentment and our attitude of entitlement. Sometimes, we are simply blinded by prosperity. We become so comfortable and life is going so well that we forget the Lord our God. This is exactly what was read for us earlier: when God blesses us and gives us these things, we must not forget the Lord our God. This is a constant, repeated theme in the book of Deuteronomy, reminding the people of God not to forget Him in prosperity, because it's in prosperity that we forget the mercies and graciousness of God, becoming distracted by the cares of this life.

Beyond that, sometimes even our present distress can cause us not to bless the Lord. Maybe there's just something particularly bad that has happened this week, and that snatches our attention away from thinking, praising, and adoring God with worshipful thanksgiving. Turn back with me to Deuteronomy chapter 6, and let's look at verses 10-12 briefly together.

In Deuteronomy 6:10-12, we see the Lord providing for His people. He says, "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant." What is He saying here? God was about to give the

children of Israel things which they did not work for. There were benefits from God, blessings from God, and bestowments upon God. He was about to give them and let them enter into the labors of others, into the things that God had given to them. And then He goes on to say, "Beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." You know what he's saying? He says when I give you things that you did not work for, things which you don't even deserve, when I give you those things and you inherit those things and receive those things, beware lest you forget the Lord, and listen to what he says, who brought you out of the house of bondage. He says don't forget when you're living in prosperity and comfort and the things that I have bestowed upon you in the benefits, don't forget where you came from.

You see, you live in your own house, oh Israel, well it's not your house, it's the house which I gave you which you did not build. Oh Israel, you eat from your own vineyards, they're not your vineyards, they're the vineyards I gave you which you did not plant. And he says beware, lest you take to yourself that which God has supplied and forget the mercies of God, that you apart from Me, says the Lord, are in Egypt in a house of bondage. That's where you were, that's where you came from. He doesn't want them to forget that, that they might remain thankful, that they might remain worshipful, that they might remain dependent upon the good pleasure and will and grace of God.

Now if that's what God commanded to Israel from their physical bondage into a physical land that He had provided for them, how much more is it for you and I who have been saved from sin, from death and from hell, from eternal damnation, eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord. Think about that for a moment, if God is saying to them, you have received that which you have not worked for, isn't that all our salvation, that we have received that which we have not worked for, that God gave His Son for us, that He might redeem us, that He might save us. When we were in our house of bondage, when we were enslaved to passions and lust, alienated and separated from the life of God, in bondage and shackled in sin, God, in His mercy and love, sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved.

Oh, this is all mercy, my friend. This is all grace. And if the psalmist looks upon physical deliverances, and if God reminds the children of Israel about their physical deliverances and how they should not lose sight of the gracious, good hand of God, how much more for us who have been delivered from sin, death, and hell? Such mercy surpasses anything that we experience in a physical sense.

We have been saved out of Egypt, but not only saved out of Egypt, we have



been saved into Christ Jesus. We have been saved out of sin, out of death, out of hell, and into new life, into Christ, in whom all the blessings of God reside. As Ephesians says, "You've been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus." These are things, my friend, that you and I did not work to obtain, things that God worked out for our salvation and for His good and glory. If Peter's mother-in-law, once healed by Jesus, arose quickly and served Him, how much more should we who have received life from the dead? How much more should we live for the glory and honor of God? How much more should we have a heart of worshipful thanksgiving? How much more should we pay our vows unto the Lord?

You see, my friend, you might ask yourself, "Well, I think I'm tracking okay in my relationship with the Lord." Let me encourage you with this: This is how we can know. You might say, "How can I know?" This is a fitting question. How can I know that I have a proper response to what the Lord has done? Well, the passage gives us two things. Two things for our consideration: one regards our lips and one regards our lives. One regards our lips and another regards our lives. The first is our lips.

What shall I give to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? Give Him the fruit of your lips. Praise Him. Praise Him. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him, all creatures here below. Praise Him, ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. What can I give to the Lord? How can I know if I'm responding right to God's mercies? Check your lips.

You see, troubled minds, minds that do not reflect upon the meditations and mercies of God, have very little time for thanksgiving. God's people that are filled with fears and anxieties and worries and concerns about life and things that happen usually have prayer lives that reflect this. Our prayer lives end up being very little thanksgiving and praise. They're request-only prayers. We go to the throne of grace and say, "Lord, please this," and "Lord, please that," and "Lord, please this," and "Lord, please that." "I need this. I need that." And we pray to God with the intention of having Him primarily alter our circumstances.

But those who reflect upon the blessings and gracious hands of God and have received mercy and grace and know that, pray not in view of the alteration of circumstances but with a view to the glory of God. Their prayers consist more of praise, more of worship, more of thanksgiving, more of reflection upon who God is and what He has done, His person and His work, and His glorious name. And then there are obviously requests and petitions, which we are required to do. But you will find in your prayer life that your praise and adoration will be lacking, and your prayers will be increased when you are in more trouble.

But if we are to render unto the Lord something for all His benefits toward us, we are to take up the cup of salvation and to call upon and worship the name of the Lord. Check our lips, check your lips, and take up a psalm, take up a hymn of praise, take up a thanksgiving, my friend. And next time you come to the Lord and you find yourself busy, just be still in the presence of the Lord and take up a praise to God. And if you say, "My mind is too hard," sing to the praises of God and let your heart rest in His merciful and bountiful deliverances. Let your heart rest in that He has saved you from your sin. Thank Him daily for His deliverances, thank Him daily that He has rescued you from who you used to be and from where you used to be, and has brought you into life abundant and free. Praise Him, worship Him, let your lips speak forth His praise.

But also, not only just praise Him with your lips, but praise Him with your life. Look upon your life and reflect upon all the times that you have promised God something and say, "I will pay my vows now in the presence of the Lord's people." As Christians, it's so easy for us to make promises, but we ought to let our yes be yes and our no be no. And when we say, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go," even if He says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head," you say to the Lord, "I will pay my vows because You are worthy." You say, "Lord, I will serve You." My friend, pay your vows and serve Him. You say, "Lord, I will worship You." Pay your vows, worship Him. Say, "Lord, I will preach Your gospel." Pay your vows, worship Him. "Lord, I will be unashamed of You." Pay your vows, not tomorrow but now, in the presence of God's people.

"Lord, I will teach Your word to my children." Pay your vows. "Lord, I will love my wife. I will love my husband." Pay your vows. Why should you pay your vows? "What shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits toward us?" Is it even a matter of question? You say, "Why this sermon on the very first Sunday?" That's a fitting question. As I was preparing this, I thought, "Why, Lord, this sermon on the very first Sunday? This is a church plant." What I've explained to you this morning is what the church is all about.

Who are we but a people that were once enslaved by sin? Why are we the way that we are today? Because God, in mercy, has reached down and benefited us. Why is it that we gather here and will continue to gather here week after week after week? Because the Lord has bestowed His mercy and grace upon us. Because He is gracious, because He is merciful, because He is long-suffering, because He has dealt bountifully with us. He has not rewarded us according to our sins deserve.

What is the church but an assembly called out from darkness into God's

marvelous light? "For you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, God's special people that have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light." For what purpose? "That you might show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." And listen to what He says: "You who were once not a people, but now are the people of God."

There is no church apart from God's saving grace. And the church will go on in the power and grace of God as long as she remembers from whence she was hewn out, from whence she came. The day the church forgets what Israel forgot is the day that her prosperity will lead to her destruction. It's the day that the church will no longer be a witness to the nations. It's the day that the power of God would leave the assembly of God's people, and we will cry, as it was upon the temple, "Ichabod! The glory of the Lord has departed."

It departed because they forgot the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. He is the One and the reason why you and I are here and shall be here forevermore. Amen.