**Rest, O my soul** 29/9/24 dkm LS h

Read: Psalm 116, 2Corinthians 4

Text: Psalm 116

Psalms: 18:1-6, old, 22:25-31, 116:1-9, 56:12-13

When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we usually sing Psalm 116 or 118, as you may have noticed! At the beginning of my ministry an elderly man, and elder in the Free Church, told me this was the practice. I have since learned, as you also are learning, that these psalms belong to the Egyptian Hallel Psalms that were sung at the Jewish Passover, the memorial meal (*seder*) that has been fulfilled or superseded in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. So it is appropriate that we sing words like, ‘I will take the cup of salvation’ and, ‘I will pay my vows to the Lord’ (116:13,14).

At Passover unleavened bread was eaten with bitter herbs and roasted meat from sacrificed lambs. But there is no mention of a cup in the OT account, apart from the words of this psalm. Yet when Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples in the Upper Room, he took a cup before and after taking the bread (Luke 22:17-20).

A cup of wine usually represents the cup of God’s wrath. The wicked drink this cup to the last drop (Ps 75:8, Jer 25:15). They get drunk and stagger in the face of disaster. Jesus prayed that he might avoid this cup of God’s wrath (Luke 22:42). But there is also a cup of blessing, the wine being sweet and refreshing to the soul (1Cor 10:16). The psalmist speaks of the Lord being his inheritance and his cup (Ps 16:5), and in Psalm 23 we are familiar with the words, ‘My cup runs over’, words that refer to the rich and bountiful blessing of the Lord.

So, the cup is used to picture both judgment and blessing or, wrath and redemption. While the Passover was a celebration of God’s deliverance from Egypt, the Exodus involved both judgment upon the wicked, as in Pharoah, and salvation for the people counted as righteous by the Lord. When we take the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes, with the understanding that when he comes he will judge the living and the dead, every person who has ever lived in this world (1Cor 11:26).

We will look at this psalm of thanksgiving and praise under three subheadings: ‘Death knocks, God answers’, ‘Delivered by the gracious and righteous Lord’ and ‘Debt of gratitude’.

**1.Death knocks, God answers**

This psalm has no title and no named writer. Even so, it is a personal cry for mercy which the Lord hears and answers with deliverance from death. Again, no specifics are given, which makes the psalm widely applicable and most useful for us today as we thank the Lord for saving us from death and giving us eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life …whoever lives and believes in me shall never die’ (John 11:25,26).

We all die once but we can avoid the second death and consignment to hell by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is natural to fear death like the psalmist but let us remember the words of the apostle Paul who met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus: ‘For me to live is Christ and die is gain’ and, ‘I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better’ (Phil 1:21,23).

While this psalm has no named writer, it is similar to Psalm 18 and other psalms written by David. Psalm 18 begins, ‘I will love you O Lord’, and he says he will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised. He praises the Lord for delivering him from death, from ‘the sorrows of Sheol’, at the hands of enemies like King Saul. Here in Psalm 116 the psalmist declares his love for the Lord who heard his cry for help. He does not at this stage of the psalm say that the Lord saved him but that the Lord had ‘inclined his ear’ to hear him. That the sovereign Lord of creation should hear his cry was amazing, because when the Lord hears he acts. He acts because he is powerful to act and save us from any situation. He acts because he is gracious and righteous, the God who makes a covenant with his chosen ones.

The Lord is always pleased to hear the voice of his chosen ones, whether it be a cry for help or a shout of raise. The Lord is not pleased when his people are silent because this means they are crying out to other gods, and giving praise to men rather than the Lord, their creator and redeemer.

Love for the Lord may not be a common expression in the OT, although we just saw it also in Psalm 18 (116:1). And Moses commanded Israel to, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’ (Deut 6:5). Do not think that the God of the OT is different to Jesus Christ in terms of love. God revealed himself to Moses as gracious and compassionate, as he did to the writer of this psalm (116:5, Exod 34:6). Jesus demonstrated the love of God in coming down to save us from sin and death through his death on the cross, but he warns of the wrath of God remaining upon those who refuse to believe in him as the Son of God (John 3:36).

Just as the nation of Isarel was to remember the Lord’s hand of salvation in the Exodus (Ps 114:1), so this man remembered this individual case of the Lord saving him from death. He would always love the Lord and call upon the name of the Lord. He had at some time in the past been very close to dying, either because of sickness or threats from enemies. ‘The cords of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me’ are most memorable words (116:3). Have you ever had cause to utter such words? A lady thrown about in a plane by turbulence thought she was going to die. The thing is, do we remember the time we thought we were going to die, and do we continue to give thanks to the Lord for saving us. Twice in the first four verses we hear the words, ‘I will call upon the Lord’, or ‘upon the name of the Lord’, and twice again later in this psalm.

If you can’t recall the Lord saving you from death in a car crash or other accident, or a terrible sickness, you must remember him saving you from sin and the second death. When we come the Lord’s Supper this is what we remember. If you have not cried out to the Lord for forgiveness of sin and saving grace, then you should not be at the Lord’s Supper. Do not simply say you love the Lord; say it from your heart and say it with understanding, understanding that the Lord first loved you, and that you were still a sinner when Christ died for you (1John 4:10, Rom 5:8). To call on the name the Lord means to understand the fullness of his revelation, including his revelation in Jesus Christ.

**2.Delivered by gracious and righteous God**

In the Lord Christ we see the revelation of God’s grace and truth (John 1:14). This psalm speaks of God being gracious and righteous, and also merciful (116:5). These are covenant words. When God delivered Israel out of Egypt he made a covenant with them, a covenant of grace. He promised to be their God, to protect them and provide for them as his own precious people. When you confess your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you also become a precious son or daughter of God under the new covenant that Jesus declared in his own precious blood. God’s grace continues, and is indeed fully manifested in the new covenant, in the death and resurrection of his own precious Son, and our Lord and saviour. Grace is greater than the law and judgment (James 1:13) in that it satisfies the requirements of the law while saving us. We could never meet these requirements so can only be saved by grace, the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

‘The simple’ or simplehearted whom ‘the Lord preserves’ are those who humble themselves before the Lord and trust in him (116:6). We must all be come like children, as Jesus says. ‘I was brought low, and he saved me’ are often things that go together (116:6). In sickness and in fear of death we become very simple. All we can do is cry to the Lord for mercy, something we are slow to do when fit and healthy. I have forgotten a lot about my time in hospital a few years back- my first time in hospital! But I do remember calling out, ‘Jesus, Jesus’, and the nurse coming running with some pain killer! Maybe you have been brought low without going to hospital. Did you call upon Jesus, and did he save you? Yes, he did because you are here today worshipping the Lord.

‘Rest, O my soul, God has been good to you’ are the beautiful words we sing. As I have just said, you are here now so God must have delivered you from whatever brought you low and brought you to himself. God wants your soul to be at rest, at rest in him. Psalm 95 concludes, ‘They shall not enter my rest’, words taken up in Hebrews 4. God wants us to rest in him, not in the things of this world. Striving for things in this world, even striving to please God with such things in order to be saved, brings no peace or rest. Rest comes from the realisation that the Lord ‘has delivered my soul from death’ (116:8).

In words reminiscent of Psalm 56:13, a song of David when he was in the hands of the Philistines, this man gives all glory and praise to the Lord for delivering him from death, from his falling into the grave. He promises to walk before the Lord all the days of his life. He realises every day of his life is a gift from the Lord, and he will live every day to glorify and enjoy God.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, verse 10 is taken as the beginning of a new psalm. This verse and the next are difficult but they can be understood within the context of this psalm. Paul actually uses the words, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke’ in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he speaks of being delivered to death for Jesus’ sake (2Cor 4:13). Jesus himself was delivered to death but remained silent before his persecutors. The psalmist admits to saying in haste, ‘All men are liars’ (116:11). His focus briefly turned to man, or men, who are unreliable and unable to save. But he did not forget the Lord even in great affliction. He always believed that only the Lord could save him. Being in pain and facing death is obviously a testing time for one’s soul. If we remember the Lord today, we will more readily remember him in affliction.

**3.Debt of gratitude**

The psalm turns from focusing on what the Lord has done to, what will I do: ‘What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?’ (116:12). If someone saves us from drowning in the surf, we want to repay them in some way. We might give them a gold watch or give to their favourite charity. The psalmist wants to thank the Lord for saving him from death, but how? Does the Lord want a gold watch? He responds, ‘I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord’ (116:13). Some think of a drink offering given along with the animal sacrifice at the temple. But we read, ‘Take the cup of salvation’ not offer it.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the cup to his disciples saying it was for them to remember his blood ‘shed for you’ (Luke 22:20). The Lord offers us this cup and is pleased when we take it. The person who saves you from the surf may not want a gold watch, saying that simply saving you is reward enough. With the Lord this is certainly the case. When he reaches out his hand to save us, he is pleased when we take hold and let him save us. We cannot give anything anyway to the maker and owner of heaven and earth.

What the Lord wants is worship and witness. In the Lord’s house, and in the presence of the people, this man promises or vows to call upon the name of the Lord (116:14,18,19). Your coming forward and partaking of the bread and wine of the sacrament, is a deeply personal act, an act signifying your relationship to the Lord. But it is also a very public act or should be. Your coming forward is a witness to those around you, and indeed to the world. You are declaring Jesus to be your saviour and Lord, to the praise and glory of God.

A sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is what the psalmist promises to offer the Lord (116:17). He will call upon the name of the Lord as long as he lives. No blood sacrifice, no material offering, just the ‘sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name’ (Heb 13:15). As believers, our whole life should be ‘a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to the Lord’ (Rom 12:1).

Vows are not to be taken lightly; vows must be kept. For a second time the psalmist says, ‘I will pay my vows to the Lord’ (116:18). In the sacrament you are acknowledging the covenant love and grace of the Lord by which you are saved. You are declaring, ‘I am your servant’; this is your standing before the Lord (116:16). You are no longer a servant or slave of sin and Satan but a servant of the Lord and of righteousness (Rom 6:18). You are saved to praise and serve the Lord, and the people of the Lord. When we pass the communion cup to the believer next to us, we are serving them are we not?

So many truths are set forth in this simple sacrament, and in this psalm! So let us keep this sacrament and not neglect this means of grace. Too many Christians are weak and frail because they are starving their souls by neglecting the sacrament, as well as the Bible itself and prayer. Remember the cost of your salvation and do not trample underfoot the precious blood of Christ by wilful sinning (Heb 10:29). Your life, your blood, is precious to the Lord, as is your death (116;15, Ps 72:14), so precious that he gave his own precious Son, and his blood, that you might have life, everlasting life.