

I Grieve And Believe

(Psalm 116)

9/22/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

We have been working our way through 1 Peter on Sunday nights, and as we have learned, 1 Peter is writing to suffering Christians..

He is writing to believers who are being persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Most are believers who had already left family and friends to follow Christ, as they are already suffering and even grieving..

But now even their government is after them, so Peter writes to encourage them.

He writes to tell them how to suffer well despite their troubles..

Tonight, I want to take us to the OT to a psalm that also deals with suffering.

Psalm 116 is a psalm that addresses a question that many people have in their suffering..

And that question is this..

Does my grief and suffering reveal a lack of faith?

In other words, it is possible for a believer to walk rightly with the Lord while suffering greatly in the world?

And the answer of this psalm is a clear “Yes.”

So let’s read this psalm and then note 3 principals of how to grieve greatly while believing fully..

*1 I love the Lord, because He hears
My voice and my supplications.*

2

*Because He has inclined His ear to me,
Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.*

3

*The cords of death encompassed me
And the [a]terrors of [b]Sheol [c]came upon me;
I found distress and sorrow.*

4

*Then I called upon the name of the Lord:
“O Lord, I beseech You, [d]save my life!”*

5

*Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
Yes, our God is compassionate.*

6

*The Lord preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.*

7

Return to your rest, O my soul,

For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

8

*For You have rescued my soul from death,
My eyes from tears,
My feet from stumbling.*

9

*I shall walk before the Lord
In the [e]land of the living.*

10

*I believed when I said,
“I am greatly afflicted.”*

11

*I said in my alarm,
“All men are liars.”*

12

*What shall I render to the Lord
For all His benefits [f]toward me?*

13

*I shall lift up the cup of salvation
And call upon the name of the Lord.*

14

*I shall pay my vows to the Lord,
Oh may it be in the presence of all His people.*

15

*Precious in the sight of the Lord
Is the death of His godly ones.*

16

*O Lord, [g]surely I am Your servant,
I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid,
You have loosed my bonds.*

17

*To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And call upon the name of the Lord.*

18

*I shall pay my vows to the Lord,
Oh may it be in the presence of all His people,*

19

*In the courts of the Lord's house,
In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
[h]Praise [i]the Lord!*

The American Civil War was truly a time when neighbor fought against neighbor, friend against friend, and even brother against brother..

It was an highly unusual war in many ways because of the close relation of people that would be on opposing sides...

One of the most unusual stories about the war involves a cabin in the woods in northern Virginia...

Both the Northern and Southern armies had groups of men that served as pickets...

Pickets were small groups of soldiers that marched ahead of the bigger group...

Often they were the first ones to be killed by the enemy but the gunfire that they drew alerted the larger army of the presence of the enemy and so pickets saved lives..

One winter, the fighting was slowed by bad weather.

However, every morning the picket army would walk out ahead and stand guard in case the enemy approached...

In this case, the Northern Union army sent their picket line out at dawn to stand guard, and then called them back at dark..

While the Southern Confederate Army did just the opposite.

They sent their picket army out at dark and made them stand guard over night before returning the next morning...

Well, it just so happened that the weather prevented either army from moving forward so for a week, the pickets went to the same place to stand guard...

And this same place happened to be the same cabin in the woods of northern Virginia...

And though they didn't know it for the first few days,...

The confederate pickets would come there at night and sleep only to leave before the union pickets would arrive the next day and stay...

Now, keep in mind the job of the pickets is to keep an open eye for the enemy.

Well, one morning the Union pickets got an earlier start than normal to the cabin...

And the Confederate pickets slept a little longer...

And so as the Union soldiers were arriving, the were startled to find the confederate soldiers leaving...

The story is told that they all tried to grab their weapons and get them loaded, but as a gunfight was about to break out, one confederate soldier recognized his cousin fighting for the north...

They called out to each other and the weapons were dropped...

The two groups of soldiers began to talk and a compromise was reached...

The Confederates could use the cabin at night and the Union soldiers could use the cabin during the day as long as one group left a hot fire for the other group before they left...

Both sides agreed and for the next few weeks while the bad weather lasted, each group of pickets remained safe and shared the cabin without any problem...

Many people refused to believe the story..

Saying that it is impossible for two enemy armies to show so kindness to one another in a time of war...

However, the story of the cabin was retold by multiple soldiers on both sides after the end of the war...

Now, the question is....

Is it possible in a time of war for people to experience peace?

I would say sure.

I think the story is very believable and probably occurred.

I think you can find small examples of peace even in times of great war...

Now, let me ask a similar question...

Can you find faith even in times of great despair and sadness?

Sometimes, we tend to look at people who mourn and filled with sorrow as people of little faith...

Often, it's tempting to see people who seem to be in desperate situations as people who possess very little trust in the Lord...

And though it can be certainly be true that sorrow and desperation can reveal a lack of faith, that is not always the case...

Sometimes faith and desperation can happen side by side in a person's life...

Sometimes great sorrow and great belief can fill a person at the same time...

Look back for a second at verse 10 of this psalm for a moment...

And consider what the psalmist wrote...

10

***I believed when I said,
"I am greatly afflicted."***

There is proof that great faith and great affliction often exist side by side in our lives...

And when that happens, we should trust in the Lord to deliver us from it...

Affliction doesn't make us run from the Lord, it makes us run to Him...

Trouble doesn't cause us to doubt God, but to count on Him...

And that is exactly what the writer of this psalm figured out...

He experienced trouble, but he also experienced deliverance...

And that caused his faith and obedience to only grow stronger...

Trouble and faith can collide in the lives of God's people, but let's see what our response should be when they do...

So, let's look 3 principles for suffering and believing in Psalm 116 tonight...

The first one is found in verses 1-4..

I. When Trouble Comes, Call on the Lord's Protection (1-4)

In verses 1-2, the writer of this psalm puts the cart before the horse so to speak...

Because he begins the psalm by giving us the outcome of the problem before he tells us the problem..

The outcome of the problem in verses 1 is that the psalmist love of the Lord has increased because God heard his prayers..

The outcome of the problem in verse 2 is that the psalmist will call to to the Lord in prayer the rest of his life...

But we have to get to verse 3 to find the problem the psalmist faced...

The cords of death encompassed him...

The terrors of Sheol came upon him...

In other words, the psalmist was at the point of death and in deep sorrow and distress...

Now the question is this referring to physical death of spiritual death...

Did the psalmist realize that he was going to die and go to hell, so he called on the Lord?

Or did the psalmist just literally mean that he was close to physically dying and he called on the Lord...

The answer is...

I don't know.

It seems to me that the psalmist was referring to a physical brush with death....

Though this psalm could certainly apply to someone who realized he was about to die without being in a right relationship with the God of the universe....

I think it best to see it as a man who had a close brush with death either through an illness or an accident or maybe at the hands of another person...

Now, it has often been said that you are only 6 feet from death every time you pass a car on a two lane road.

And there are also other circumstances that put people near death all the time..

Sometimes, people put themselves close to death by their own actions...

I am not sure that the psalmist had this in mind when he wrote this psalm...

But the point is that death was knocking at his door, so he did what a believer in God should do, he called upon the Lord in verse 4...

“Lord, I beseech you, save my life.”

That short prayer brings to mind the short prayer of Peter who began to sink in the water after taking a few steps on the Sea of Galilee.

In those desperate situations, the eloquence of a prayer isn't necessary.

Just say what needs to be said.

It is not a prayer like....

“The cords of death encompass me...The terrors of Sheol are around me...Father, if it be your will, deliver me from the outstretched hand of death.”

No, the prayer is Save me, Lord.

Often times, our prayers are said for the benefit of others ears and not for the benefit of the Lord's ears...

You don't have to say a church-approved prayer for God to answer you...

You simply need to call to God with a desperate heart..

And that is what the psalmist does...

And that is simply the application to our own hearts tonight....

Call to the Lord in your time of need....

And call to him with your problem...

That seems like such common sense, but often times, we call on everyone else first...

We let our prayer partners know our needs before we tell them to the Lord.

We let our family know our needs before we give them to our Father in heaven.

When you need help, your first call should go up before any of them go out...

So when trouble comes, call the Lord...

II. When Help Comes, Praise the Lord's Character (5-11)

The result of the psalmist prayer is found in verse 6...

I was brought low and he saved me...

Then he gives the same result in different words in verse 8....

For you have rescued my should from death...

And look what that causes the psalmist to do in verse 5...

IT causes him to praise the Lord's character....

Gracious is the Lord....

Righteous is the Lord...

Verse 6...

The Lord preserves and saves...

Verse 7...The Lord dealt bountifully with me...

In other words, the Lord is more than good to me...

Look, we do this all the time when we talk about people...

You will hear about someone who gave some money to help someone in need, and what usually comes out of your mouth next?

He is such a good man....

She is such a good woman...

Always helping people and taking care of folks...

And if we offer praise to people's character, we certainly should offer praise of God's character...

And I love how the psalmist praises the Lord at the end of verse 7....

For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you...

The Hebrew word that was used here is not just God is good to you....

We often say God is good...

But the psalmist is saying...

God is more than good....

He is bountifully good to us...

And how do we know that?

Look at the original prayer of the psalmist in verse 4...

His prayer was Lord, save my life from death....

But look at how the Lord answered his prayer in verse 8....

The Lord not only rescued him from death...

He also rescued his eyes from tears and kept his feet from stumbling...

That is the bountiful goodness of God...

It goes beyond our expectations...

When our family went to California for seminary, we had no idea that we would back home until it was all done...

We left in December of 2010, and for all we knew it would at least be 3 years before we got to see our family again...

But the following April, a family from our church in Union offered to fly us home...

We were overwhelmed and grateful to come back and get to spend 2 weeks at home that summer...

We flew back and thought, well at least it won't be 3 years until we get to see everyone again..

But then in the fall, a member of our family offered to pay for airline tickets to bring us home at Christmas....

And then the next summer and the next winter, and for all 3 years at seminary, we never went more than 6 months without coming home to get some encouragement to go back...

That is a bountifully good God, who not only meets your needs, he exceeds them and keeps exceeding them over and over and over...

Just when you think, God is done being so good to me, more goodness comes your way...

The psalmist was rescued from death but God also ended his sorrow and also put his feet back on the right path...

Then in verse 9-11, the psalmist is overcome by how good God how has been to him that his commitment to God in strengthened in 3 ways...

In verse 9, God's rescue of him immediately causes him to commit to public obedience to His God..

Radical salvation encourages radical obedience...

If a fireman comes and pulls you to safety from your burning home....

And then he tells you to makes sure you keep the batteries changed in your smoke alarm?

What is your response?

You never let the batteries go dead in a smoke alarm in your house ever again...

The radical salvation of the fireman caused you to radically obey what he asked you to do...

The same is true with our obedience to God...

When owe our rescue to God, we also owe our obedience to him as well...

And that is what the psalmist vowed in verse 9...

The second commitment of the psalmist after his rescue is to affirm his faith even in his affliction...

The next time trouble comes is simply another opportunity to display his faith in God...

And finally the third commitment of the psalmist is to turn to no one else in his time of need than to the Lord.

He writes that in his time of affliction, all men are liars...

Though there are various ways to interpret this...

I think it best to see this as a rebuke to all the people around him when he was in trouble...

IT seems that most were telling him that death was the only result possible in his situation...

Maybe no one gave him a chance of rescue...

No one that is but God...

And since God has proved to be true to save him, he consider all the doubters liars....

And he commits to putting his trust in no one but God....

The final section of this psalm begins in verse 12...

I have simply called this...

III. When Reflection Comes, Give Thanks to the Lord with Your Obedience(12-19)

As we move to verse 12, the psalmist seems to be past his time of trouble and rescue...

And now he is simply considering what to think about his narrow escape from death...

He writes in verse 12...

12

***What shall I render to the Lord
For all His benefits [f]toward me?***

This seems to be a question of reflection....

In the aftermath of someone's goodness to you, you often ask yourself...

“I wonder what I can do for them to return the favor or gift that they gave me...”

This seems to be the psalmist's heart as well...

And so he comes up with a list of ways to say thanks to God...

And that list begins in verse 13 where the psalmist says that he will lift his cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord...

This is difficult to understand exactly what he meant here...

It could be a literal cup of wine that Jews often offered to God along with their sacrifices...

IT could be a figure of speech that simply means he will tell others that the Lord is responsible for him being rescued...

If it were New Testament times, it would be easy to understand....

We lift a cup to the Lord every time we take part in the Lord's Supper thanking him for the blood of Christ that was poured out to cover our sins...

It think it best to see this a literal cup that would go along with a celebration to honor and remember the Lord's goodness...

The second response to reflecting on the Lord's goodness leads to the conclusion of verse 14....

The psalmist is going to pay his vows to the Lord...

That is another way of saying he is simply going to obey the Lord with his actions in life...

And I think it is noteworthy for us to see that the psalmist hoped that his obedience could be seen by the public...

The Pharisees wanted to be public with their strict obedience to the Law so that people would admire them and talk about how spiritual they were...

Here, the psalmist wants to publicly obey God so that the people will see how much he loves God.

That makes all the difference...

Some people drop their money in the offering plate so that their neighbor sees their unselfishness...

Some people drop their money in the offering plate as a way to praise the Lord...

Then verses 15-17, the psalmist describes another way that he will respond to God's goodness in saving him...

Not only will he lift up a ceremonial cup of thanksgiving to God...

Not only will he live a life of obedience to God in front of others...

#3...He will also offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving...

Now, we lose the meaning of this because we as the church live in an age where animal sacrifices are long gone...

Jesus as our sacrificial Lamb ended the era of the sacrificial system...

But before his death, animal sacrifices were a part of life...

And they were true sacrifices because they required a man or woman to take a valuable possession and offer it to God...

We read a sacrifice of thanksgiving in verse 17 and we think that simply means to express our thanks to the Lord in a prayer....

But for the psalmist and for us, a sacrifice of thanksgiving was that...

It required the person offering it to truly give up something as a way of offering thanks to God..

Its one thing to send a thank you note to someone who stops and helps you change a tire on the side of the road...

It's a whole other thing to send that thank you with a Outback gift card stuffed inside it..

The same should be true with the thanks we offer to God...

True thankfulness often goes beyond words to action...

God, thank you for delivering my body from that cancer, I'll be up 15 minutes early every morning to spend time with you and your Word...

Lord, thank you for the new job, Ill be at church every time the doors are open and find a way to serve you in ministry there.

Now, why is the psalmist so thankful and ready to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving?

Look back up in verse 15-16...

He writes this...

***“15 Precious in the sight of the Lord
Is the death of His godly ones.***

16

***O Lord, [g]surely I am Your servant,
I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid,
You have loosed my bonds.***

Now, you have probably heard those verses at the funeral of a Christian man or woman...

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones” is often printed on funeral bulletins...

But the interesting thing about the context of this verse is this...

It was written by a psalmist who didn't die, but was saved from death...

This is not a funeral psalm, this is a psalm of deliverance...

What the psalmist is saying is this...

God, you don't take lightly the fact that some of your people are surrounded by death...

You love your people, and you know that death is the enemy.

And you do not take the death of your people lightly...

The word precious there means costly...

It costs the Lord when one of His people die...

IT costs him another soldier in the fight against the forces of evil in the world...

Even though death leads to life for the people of God, the world is a less righteous place...

When believers die and prayer warriors die and pastors die and missionaries die, the battlefield of the world has one less person on the Lord's side...

From an eternal perspective, the world is truly a worse place when a man or woman of God dies..

And for that reason, it is costly to the Lord and precious to the Lord when his saints die...

But what had happened in the life of the psalmist, he was saved..

He was delivered, and that meant one thing to him....

Look at verse 16...

Lord, surely I am your servant...

The fact that God delivered him proved that he belonged to the Lord and he was valuable to the Lord's purposes in the world...

That is why it is no accident when Christians survive longer than expected or escape death....

God has more work for them to do on earth...

The are precious to him and valuable to him so much that he saves them from sure death at times...

That is why this verse is probably more appropriate when a Christian pulls through a near death experience rather than at his funeral...

The final verses of 18-19 are just a repetition of the psalmist commitment to pay his vows....

And he even speaks of the public nature of his commitment to obey again....

And his desire that he will obey in the temple and in the town...

The thought is this...

Obedience first shows up to the people that we are closest to...

If you can't obey the Lord in your own home, you won't obey Him in the church or much less in the world...

The first one to see obedience is you and the Lord, followed by the family, the church and then the world...

This final section is simply a response of the psalmist to the deliverance of verses 1-8...

And the conclusion of the psalmist's response to deliverance is this....

He will worship the Lord with a cup in verse 13....

He will obey the Lord with his life in verse 14...

And He will thank the Lord with a true sacrifice in verse 17...

And worship, obedience, and thankfulness are what the Christian life is all about...

Conclusion

Let me end with this...

A few weeks ago in John, we saw Jesus in the Upper Room with his disciples as he transformed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper...

And as they finished the first Lord's Supper, the Bible says that they sang a hymn before they went out the Mount of Olives where Jesus would be arrested....

Do you know what they sang?

Well, Passover always ended with the Jews singing the psalms and specifically, they sang psalms 113-118..

It was called the hallel, which meant praise to God...

Psalms 113-114 were normally sung before the meal and psalms 115-118 after it...

As we think about Jesus singing psalm 116 on the night or even in the early morning before his death...

Think of the thoughts that raced through his mind...

Though he knew that he would be brought low, he also knew that HE would be delivered from death...

And because of that, he kept his vows to go to the cross and to die as part of God's plan of salvation...

Consider his thoughts as he ended psalm 116...

I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all the people....

In the courts of the LORD's house...

In the midst of you, O Jerusalem....

Praise the LORD...

If we follow in the footsteps of Christ, we live lives of obedience to God for all the world to see, knowing that God will ultimately rescue us from death as well...

Amen, church?

Let us pray.