

“Telling Your Story”

Psalm 116

Next week Sunday we're going to walk you through Jesus' Passover with His disciples, comparing it with the traditional Passover Seder and showing you how the story of Jesus and the story of the Exodus weaves brilliantly together. So much so, that every Jewish person should see clearly that Jesus is indeed their Messiah.

And we've been seeing that as we've been studying the Passover songs – Ps. 113-118 called the 'Egyptian Hallel' – which Jesus and His disciples would have sung at their last Passover together. The songs reflect on God's goodness to stoop down and rescue His people, how God not only did great things in Israel's past but He can still bring life out of that which is dead and that the promises of God stand true to bless us and give us joy in His presence, even though at the moment we may be experiencing persecution or difficulties.

And we've also seen how these songs, sung by Jesus, pointed to Jesus Himself. He who stooped down to help us by becoming a human. He who died and came back to life to offer us the same hope. He who hours away would suffer on the cross and die, yet still called us to trust in God knowing that we serve the Only living God who actually sees, hears and understands us completely.

Ps. 115-118 were sung as the Passover concluded. This next psalm, Ps. 116, continues on talking about suffering and death only this time as a first-person testimony. The unnamed writer recalls his own personal suffering – a suffering that almost ended in death – but one from which God rescued him for which he was grateful and vowed to sing God's 'Hallelujah's'.

But why this personal testimony in the midst of a national celebration of God's past deliverance? Because the Passover is not just a celebration of God's saving Israel but it's also every individual's testimony if they applied the blood of the Lamb to their doorposts. The psalmist tells his story of how God saved him in such a way that we can identify with it. And we're going to see that the way he tells it is the basic way we tell our story of how God saved us. [Pray]

He starts his own story with a declaration of his love for God;

"I love the LORD for He heard my voice, He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish if the grave came upon me, I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the Name of the LORD 'O save me!'"

Every testimony starts with a need. Here the need was the follower of God was near death. The need was beyond a human solution. His only solution was God. Notice that 3 times we're told in the first two verses that we have a God who hears. Last week in Ps. 115 we were warned not to trust idols because they can't see or hear. But God can. This is how all our testimonies begin:

God Heard My Cry for Help
(Ps. 115:1-4)

When we sensed our need of forgiveness for our sins, when we realize we couldn't get to God on our own and needed salvation we cried out to God and He heard our prayer. *'He turned His ear to me'*; literally, He bent down to listen. The fact that He hears our prayers and acts on them

Reveals His love for us (vv.1-2)

God's love results in action. He acts when we call on Him. And this happens for us over and over, not just at salvation because our testimony isn't about how God saved us only, its about how God worked and is working in our life. If your testimony begins and ends with only your salvation experience then you have a problem. Because salvation is the beginning of God's work in you. The evidence of His continual work in you reveals you are saved. There has to be fruit.

Here the prayer is of a God follower who is in a difficult situation. He was about to die. Maybe through sickness, probably through an enemy attack. Possibly, like many of us, he may have sought his own solution, his own resources, the wisdom of friends –probably googled it and still had no solution! – and finally with nowhere else to turn he turns to God. Or, Lord willing he turned to God immediately because that was his practice. The reason we turn to God is because we believe He cares and loves us and so we call on Him and reveals His love for us,

By saving us (vv.3-4)

This is a great Passover song because this is how God delivered them from Egypt. He answered their cries for help. He sent Moses, and accompanied with the plagues of judgment, rescued His people Israel. The psalm itself is somewhat general. Aside from the deathly predicament, we don't know the details. But that helps us identify with the writer because his story weaves into our story. Ultimately, we are all facing a dying predicament. One day this life will end and we need to deal with our sin before we die. Like the exodus out of Egypt, God makes the path of escape – which is what the word 'save' means in v.4 – and does all the work for us except the last part where He said celebrate the Passover by killing and eating one of your lambs and apply its blood to your doorpost believing that God will spare you from death when the angel of death comes that night. Notice they did this before the angel of death came. It was an act of faith believing that God would spare you from death if you put your trust in what His Word says. Belief in His Word means you do what He says.

And we need to continue to live that out daily. Reading His Word, memorizing His Word and then doing what it says. We need to continually take our needs to God so that He can meet our needs, reminding us He loves us so we can sing His praises to others. *'I will call upon Him as long as I live.'* That should be our testimony too.

So, he summarizes God's rescue operation in his life by first telling us God heard his cry for help and in vv.5-11 he tells us how ...

God Graciously Met His Need **(116:5-9)**

- ⁵ *The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.*
- ⁶ *The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.*
- ⁷ *Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.*
- ⁸ *For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling,*
- ⁹ *that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*
- ¹⁰ *I believed; therefore I said, "I am greatly afflicted."*

¹¹ *And in my dismay I said, "All men are liars."*

The writer acknowledges God is not obligated to meet our needs. But He is gracious. Grace implies we get something we didn't deserve. Sometimes you hear Christians demand or 'declare' God promises as if just because I declare it God is obligated to act. That's arrogance. That's presumption on our part. That's testing God which we are commanded not to do. When Moses interceded with God to spare wiping out Israel for the golden calf incident, God promised Moses,

"I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."
Then Moses said, 'Now show me Your glory.'

Some translations add 'Now I pray, show me Your glory' to soften the statement because there is no word for 'I pray'. It is literally Now, show me! And it is an imperative. It is not a humble request. God said I'm pleased with you Moses and Moses took advantage of that and stepped out of line commanding God to reveal Himself to Moses. How did God answer Moses?

¹⁹ *And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."*

Moses presumptuously demanded to see God's face based on God's temporal favour but God graciously rebuked Moses and said "I will show mercy and compassion on who-ever I choose, whenever I choose." And Moses never asked again! God will graciously meet our need not because we deserve it or 'claim' it but because,

He cares (vv.5-6)

Gracious, righteous and compassionate. The psalmist describes the nature of God based on how God has treated him. He humbly acknowledges the undeservedness of his being rescued from death. He acknowledges God is righteous – He always does what is right according to His will – and is compassionate. The word for compassionate means 'a feeling of affection toward another based on relationship, which manifests itself in action.' God answers the prayers of His people because He is committed to our relationship. The writer identifies himself as one who is 'simple'. This is often a negative word especially used in the proverbs to distinguish the wise from the naïve. But the word is also used to describe one who needs to learn.

The difficulties of life cause us to turn to God where we, in our humility ask for help because we need to learn trust. We need to learn patience. We need to learn how to allow God to work in our life instead of trying to control it. *"The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low and He saved me"*.

When God graciously meets our need by answering our prayer,

He gives us peace (vv.7-8)

⁷ *Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. ⁸ For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling,*

'Return to rest' or 'be at rest once more' implies he lost peace with God while stressing over this threatening experience. It's hard to be at peace in the difficulties of life. Lots of verses

call us to be at peace. Ps. 46:10, Is. 26:3, Matt. 11:28-30, Phil. 4:6-7 are classic verses on God's peace. We know them because we need them! God's peace comes when we recognize God's goodness and ability to rescue us from problems and situations and trust Him to resolve them.

When we're in difficult situations or majorly stressed we lose sight of our purpose. Not surprisingly when we acknowledge God's graciousness to meet our need, we not only have peace but our mind is cleared up since,

He's renewed our purpose (vv.9-11)

⁹ that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. ¹⁰ I believed; therefore I said, "I am greatly afflicted." ¹¹ And in my dismay I said, "All men are liars."

He writes that because God has rescued him, he will walk before the Lord; acknowledging His presence in His life to do what God wants. Walking with God or walking before God always means obedience. It took the stress of his predicament to renew his faith in God and thus his purpose, to walk with God. As he wakes up from his situation, he realizes that most people are liars. Something obviously happened that caused him to trust or at least temporarily listen to advice from people. And it didn't turn out well.

Now that he's recited God's work in his life to meet his need and now that he has peace again and a renewed desire to walk before God,

He Shares His Story with Others **(116:12-19)**

When God does a work in our life, we need to share it with others. Others who need to hear God is working in people's lives because they might be questioning that as they look at their own situation. He wants to 'repay' the Lord somehow and he realizes the best way to 'repay' God is by telling others what God did for him. This is why we should tell others what God has done in our life:

As our response to His work in our life (vv.12-14)

¹² How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. ¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

The language is 'offering language'. He's going to repay God by bringing a sacrificial gift at the temple. A vow would be accompanied by an agricultural or monetary gift of some kind. God doesn't need anything Himself but His people do and His work does. And he wants to do it publicly so others know why he is doing it, as a thank offering to God. He wants to show people he is committed to God.

Even in death (v.15)

This verse seems out of place since he didn't die but perhaps, he's acknowledging that he was willing to praise God even if he wasn't spared because he is confident of his relationship with God. That death for the believer is the path to His glorious presence and God does not take that lightly. He values our sacrifices for Him, even our lives. They are precious to Him.

But along those lines his salvation story where God heard his cries for help and graciously met his need was something he wanted to share with others

Even if it costs (vv.16-19)

So he picks up his promise to fulfil his vows to the Lord, in the presence of God's people in the temple. There will be cost involved when sharing our God stories with others. When we share it with the unsaved, we get a wide variety of responses; indifference, anger, doubt, curiosity and hopefully a seed planted for a future conversation. But even sharing it is a sacrifice of our pride, our wills and our time. We need to show others that we are God's servants wanting to serve Him sacrificially so that they will realize their own need for Him, and cry to God as their only source of hope so He can graciously meet their need through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then they'll tell their story and that's how the message of the gospel has spread since Jesus was on this world.

What was Jesus' story? Not much different than ours. While Jesus never sinned and didn't need Himself as His Saviour [!], He did come to earth and be one of us. He was in a life-threatening situation where the cords of death surrounded Him. He was surrounded by liars who refused to believe who He was and had Him killed. He was brought low; low into the grave and yet God saved Him and brought Him back to life – resurrected life, rescuing Him from death's claim on all life. He returned to His rest in God's presence where He sits before the throne.

As we imagine Jesus singing His story through this song, one can't help notice that Jesus lifted and drank from the cup of salvation at the Last Supper. The 3rd cup of the Passover is called the cup of redemption. It is this cup that most scholars believe Jesus referred to when He said this was the cup of the covenant inaugurated by the shedding of His blood. It is His death that God values most and is most precious for all of us. Jesus fulfilled His vows for which we give thanks to God for.

And while I might be making more of this psalm about Jesus than I should be, if it weren't for the fact that we know this was sung at the Passover and Jesus sang it. But we also know that v.1 and Ps. 18:1 are the only two psalms that begin 'I love the Lord.' Ps. 18 is a Psalm of David. And Ps. 18:4-6 is almost the same as Ps. 116:3-4, especially the phrase the cords of death surrounded me. And Ps. 116:9 and Ps. 56:13 (another Psalm of David) are the only two places where the writer says he will walk before God in the land of the living. The allusion to psalms of David almost always hint at the future Son of David, the Messiah. And one more passage in Ps. 116 hints at a Jesus reference. V. 16 says,

"I am Your servant, I am Your servant the son of Your handmaid."

The Old Testament often prophesies of Jesus as the servant of the Lord but why mention here that He's God's servant but also the son of just the handmaid – not mentioning the husband of the handmaid? And if we needed more allusions to Jesus in this psalm we'll see on Easter when we look at Ps. 118 (clearly a Messianic psalm) that this psalm (116) flows right into that one; God rescuing the writer from death.

Jesus could summarize His testimony on earth as one where He cried out to God for help, God met His need and now He spends the rest of His life telling His story. And that's our story in a nutshell too. Somewhere in our past we recognized our need for God. We cried out to Him to save us. He graciously did that because He cares. And now we have peace in Him and a purpose in life to keep sharing our story with those who don't know Christ. If you've always wondered how to tell your story, now you have a biblical framework from which to tell it. I pray you can understand your own story better. I pray you would have Holy Spirit boldness to share God's care and concern for others through how He's changed your life.

Pray for opportunities to share your story with others this week. Yes, it won't be easy and it will involve sacrifices in some way, but be encouraged by your obedience. Believe God can keep adding to your story, delivering you from new difficulties so that you can stand before others and tell them what God did but is also doing in your life.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
at olivet@rideau.net