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Psalm 116:12-14 "How Can I Pay My Debt of Gratitude?"
August 19, 2018

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalms 116.

We mentioned to you I think last week that Psalm 113 to 118 are a group of Psalms that are called the Hallel Psalms, or hallelujah Psalms. They were sung almost exclusively around the Jewish feast days of Pentecost and Passover and Tabernacles. This particular Psalm was sung at the Passover feast. Now, that's significant for us because that would tell us that Jesus and His disciples sang this Psalm on the night before He was to be betrayed and then arrested and killed. There's a verse in Matthew 26 that says of the last supper, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." And so it's interesting in light of what is written here that Jesus would sing this on His way to the Cross.

The Psalm is definitely a Psalm of thanksgiving. It was written by somebody, we don't know who, who was close to death. It seems like they were sick or been injured. It didn't look good. And yet God had stepped in to help, maybe at the last minute. We read in the first couple of verses, "I love the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplication. And He has inclined His ear to me, so I'm going to worship Him as long as I live." He writes in verse 3, "The pains of death have encircled me and the pangs of Sheol have laid hold of me." "I was brought low," he writes in verse 6. "You have delivered my soul from death," he writes in verse 8. "I find myself," in verse 9, "again in the land of the living." He talks about his assessment of his life prior to what God did. Ends up by saying, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." I mean, his whole attitude had changed and he came through this illness and this what-if kind of experience with a renewed sense of the goodness of God. He felt indebted to the Lord, and he wanted to loudly worship the Lord and be heard and take notice of all that God had done.

There are lots of Bible commentators who think Hezekiah wrote this Psalm, particularly when you might remember he was very

close to death. The prophet had already told him he was going to die when he began to pray, and the Lord gave him 15 more years of life. That's a great guess. I can't tell you that it's true, because there's no proof biblically for it. But whoever wrote it, it was certainly personal, it was filled with thanksgiving, and it was written by a guy that had come and seen death up close and turned back around.

When I think about Jesus singing this at the Last Supper, it kind of highlights the sure triumph over the sharpness of the passion He was about to face in the garden, and said ultimately, I'm going to triumph over death. "Precious in His sight is the death of His saints."

But I wanted to start at verse 12, which is really the crux of the motivation for him writing this, where he writes, "What shall I render to the Lord for all of His benefits towards me?"

Have you ever heard someone say, "I can't thank you enough"? Sometimes that's just appropriate language. It seems like it's proper to say. Other times we mean it. We feel like we're totally indebted. I think verse 12 is the spiritual equivalent of that for the Psalmist. The Lord had intervened and healed him from a deadly ailment. He admits in verse 11 that his attitude had been pretty bad. "I said in my haste, all men are liars." He just -- he got about as sour as could be towards everyone and everything that would have encouraged his hope. I was angry. I -- I was in the midst of it. He had spoken in haste. But now on the other side, he wonders out loud in verse 12 what he could possibly give to the Lord for everything that God had given to him. In fact, the goodness of God in this healing had forced this Psalmist to begin to take inventory of the benefits, all of them, he writes, that had been given to him. When Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he said that we should rejoice, not in uncertain riches, but in the living God who richly gives us all things to enjoy. And this brush with death had caused this man to begin to count his blessings.

Years ago, as a young Christian -- and I would love to tell you who the pastor was, and maybe if it comes to me I'll be happy to tell you, but he gave a sermon on making a blessings list and then going over it always, or often. He said it is so easy to forget all that God has given us. But if you go back and kind of read over it, man, you can't help but be grateful and thankful, and it takes away a lot of the dissatisfaction with life. A blessing list. God gives

great blessing to every man, even those who don't know Him. He gives them sunsets and a love of family and health and a meaningful existence for a time, but all those things are temporary. He gives you the gift and me the gift of eternal life, where Jesus came to take the consequences of our sin. There's a lot to be thankful for, is there not? A lot for us to just, like, make a list of. It will be a long list.

I remember marveling the first thing that I had on my list when I was-- years ago taught the lesson was that God had chosen me to be an heir of His grace. And I must tell you, that confuses me. John 15 verse 16 says, "You have not chosen Me, I've chosen you, that you might go bear fruit, and that fruit should remain, that you should be able to ask the Father anything in My name, I could give it to you." The fact that God chose me to this day messes up my concepts. I have no idea why He picked me. And I was thinking, sitting up here looking around as we were worshipping, I have no idea why God chose you either. I mean, there are far more faithful people than us to choose, aren't there? You know of some yourself. Unless you're totally blind to yourself, you would not put your name on the top of that list. And yet God chooses us, and that's a mind blower. And then to add the fact that He knows all about me and He chooses me. You might choose me because you see whoever I present to be. To know me is to not love me is the way that goes. You know what I mean? And I suspect that's true of you as well. And if not, I could ask your wife or your husband. They love us because they have to. God chooses to. I guess they do as well. God chose you and I, even though there are more faithful, desirable, fruitful, and gracious folks. It's at the top of my list, God chose me. He's not sorry, He won't take it back, He didn't change His mind. I'm going to heaven because He chose me. That is amazing. And I don't really care if you choose me or not, because He chose me. Kind of sets you free from pleasing everyone. I'm chosen by the Lord.

Not only did He choose me, He loves me. He loves me. "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. He knows their frame. He remembers they're dust." And God compares Himself there in Psalm 103, a couple of Psalms back, to a Father who loves His children, seeing them through the eyes of a Father, who throws in their weaknesses and covers them with an understanding that they're trying. The word "pities" in Hebrew is a word that means to have compassion with understanding. God's mind is constantly on His weak, loving children. And the Bible said it would -- the thought of you warms His heart, because He

knows you for who you are. "How precious are Your thoughts towards me, O, God. Great is the sum of them. If I should count them, they are more in number than the sea -- or than the sand. When I awake, I will be like You. I will be with You."

God has chosen me. God loves me and God has sent His Son to redeem me. He picks me, He loves me, He buys me. It's true of you as well. What an awesome price God was willing to pay for you. I suspect very few of us would pay that price for any one of us in the pew next to us. For some even a good man would die, but not very often. That He would send His Son to ransom my soul from death amazes me to this day, stops me in my tracks. I was made by Him, chosen by Him, loved by Him, and then bought by Him.

And here sits this Psalmist, back from death's door, saying to himself, I can't thank you enough, and wondering how that should work. I don't know what you're thankful for this morning, but even more, how does that translate into the way you live or behave? And he makes a list for himself of blessings. He uses the words, "All His benefits." And he realizes that everything on his list he can't reciprocate God for, he can't pay God back for. What can I give to the Lord in response for all of His benefits towards me? What can I possibly give Him that would be of any value to Him?

There are people in my life, and maybe you have them too, that I find extremely difficult to go shopping for. For some of them it's because they already have everything that they could ever want. In fact, anything that I could afford to buy them, they've got a better model of it already. The only thing I can give them is a bag to put it all in. What do you give to someone who's got everything? I think that is -- that dilemma gave birth to the gift cards movement. "I'll just get them a gift card. They can get whatever they want. And I was great and thoughtful, because I couldn't come up with anything else."

When Asaph wrote that Psalm 50 about the Lord speaking, the Lord said, "All of the beasts of the forest are Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. The birds on the mountains, You call them by name. The beasts of the field, the wild ones, are Mine. If I was hungry, I certainly wouldn't tell you; the world is Mine, and everything that's in it," or "all of it is fullness" I think is what it says. How do you give God something if He has everything? How is what I have going to add to His value or worth?

15 or 20 years ago we had one of the ladies leading worship here, and I was selling a guitar, and her daughter, who was maybe five or six, found out about it and said to her dad, "I want to buy that for mom for her birthday." Well, there's no way she was going to be able to afford the guitar. I think her dad said to her, "How much money do you have?" She said, "\$14." And so her dad said, "We can get it for that." And he came and bought the guitar from me and handed it to his daughter and said, "Give this to your mom." Now, there was no way that this small child could add any material value to her parents' worth, but the value of what she sought to do was not in the \$14; it was in the heart of love and sacrifice that drove this little girl to get something for her mom. And because of that, regardless of how expensive or inexpensive a guitar would have been, it would have meant the world to her. As it should.

Perhaps you have experienced the disaster of your kids bringing you breakfast in bed for your birthday. I got that once. The first mistake was letting them cook themselves. I blame their mother. Then allowing them to carry a tray into the bedroom, where we promptly began to wear the eggs and the toast and the orange juice. It was everywhere. And I remember saying to myself, well, they meant well. It's the thought that counts. And it is. And it is. Because it is the thought that mattered, the love that brings its value, the consideration from the heart that makes it worthwhile to you.

And here the Psalmist realizes, man, he's dead if the Lord doesn't intervene. But there's nothing that he could give God in that material sense that would benefit Him. And he sat, I think, and thought about it for a while, because he writes the question in the words here. What he comes up with is marvelous to know and important to grasp, and that is, God's only interest, just like you wearing egg in bed, is the heart that motivates the behavior. You can't give Him anything that He needs, but you can give Him what He wants, and what He wants is your love and your response to His love.

There's a great verse in Malachi Chapter three verse 16, and it says, "Those that fear the Lord spoke often to one another, and the Lord listened in; and had a book of remembrance written in His presence of those who feared the Lord, who would meditate on His name." God's scrapbook in your regard was the things that you've said and wanted to do for His name. That moves Him more than anything else. You can't give Him

anything He needs, but you can certainly give Him what He wants.

It was gratitude that drove the Psalmist to consider what he could return to the Lord in His goodness, and it places him in the good company of at least one healed leper who in Luke 17 years later realized on his way out with the other nine that he had been touched by God and went back to be thankful. But most were not.

"What can I give to the Lord for all of His benefits toward me?" And the couple of verses that follow, he answers his own questions, beginning in verse 13 with the words, "I will take the cup of salvation." I find it ironic that he said, "What can I give to the Lord?" And the first thing he says is, I'm going to take it from Him. What can I give God? I'll just take it. But I'm going to take the cup of His salvation, or in reality, I'm going to accept from God what He has provided for me for life. I'm going to trust Him, I'm going to have faith in His actions, and as a result I'm going to follow Him. To all of the suggestions of what you might do for God comes this answer: God seeks only confidence in Him. Explicit trust. Turning to Jesus, we honor Him. We appropriate what He has provided for our fellowship, and we please the Lord. "What shall I render to the Lord for all of His benefits towards me?" John -- I'm going to say 6:28. I'm going to say John 6:28. I think it's right. But the answer is, "This is the work of God," verse 29, that you believe on Him whom He sent." That's all God's looking for.

You can't give Him anything He needs, but you can give Him what He desires, and that's in your purveyance. That's what God has given to you to respond with. Agreeing with God about your need for Him, seeking to follow Him is the exact response God is looking for. Gratitude drove the Psalmist to receive God's provision for His life. And I think it is a profound insight that you can repay the Lord for all that He has done simply by receiving the gift He wants to give you. "Oh, you know what I'm going to do for the Lord?" Yeah, just receive the gift that He's giving you. Amazing.

Once I receive His saving grace, then I am able to call upon His name, because now I have access to His throne. I'm invited to come and pray and to -- by the blood of His Son, I'm welcomed in God's fellowship. It amazes me that Jesus sang this song at a last supper where He held up the cup of redemption, the third cup of the Passover feast, and said, "This is the cup of My blood, shed for you." He would soon

be drinking the cup of suffering completely empty so that you could drink from the cup of salvation completely, if you will. I will take the cup of salvation. Here is how I'm going to express my gratitude for God's goodness. I'm going to respond by faith.

Secondly, verse 13, I'm going to call upon the name of the Lord. More than just being saved, I'm going to live my life intertwined with God's, seeking His will, seeking His ways, dependent in my life, an open heart that wants to hear what God has to say. The Lord is near those with a broken heart, we read in the Psalms. In fact, there's a great Psalm -- no, no, not Psalm, Isaiah 50 -- 66, I believe, it starts at the beginning and it says, "Lord says, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where are you going to build a house for Me? And where is going to be the place of My rest? I have made all of these things. By Me they all exist. But this is one thing that I'm looking for: He who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and he who trembles at My word.'" That's what God is looking for: Someone who will not only accept His free offer of life, agreeing with Him that you need Him, but then responding to living a life that lines up with His will.

I will call upon Him in prayer. My life will be interspersed with His. I will believe and receive. I will live my life in a present tense seeking His will, calling upon His name, letting Him be a part of my life. And then thirdly, verse 14, "And then I'll pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all of His people." Or if you will, I'll live a life in relationship with God that other people can see, and I will continue to do what God asks me to do; not just promised to do it, but do it. I suspect he made a lot of promises while he was laying there dying. Lord, if You'll heal me, here's what I'm going to do for You. I'm going to respond. I'm going to make myself accountable. I'm going to live a life that is a witness to others. I'll do it in full sight of the crowds, in the presence of His people. I'll be involved and encouraging. I'll be a benefit.

In so doing, verse 15 then says, that kind of life is precious when it dies in the sight of the Lord, because it is that which God is looking forward to. This man had almost died. I suspect that he looked over his life and went, man, I can live differently. And now that he has understood what he hopes to do in those three verses there in the middle, he realizes that that kind of life is precious in God's sight. The Lord will delight when I depart this present flesh and go to be

with Him. Look, the Psalmist had been close to departure, and God had delayed His arrival.

Death is our last enemy. I know we see it as a curse, but to the saints it is not. It is the arrival at a place that you're destined to be. It's a precious day in God's calendar. It removes the last obstacle between you and the Lord. It's not a penalty, not destruction, not a loss. Ultimate victory. And I think about Jesus singing this on the way to Gethsemane. Precious in the sight of the Lord, the death of His saints. None more precious than His. Spurgeon wrote a note in his Bible on this verse that I thought was pretty good. He wrote, "When Baxter lay dying, his friends came to see him. Baxter's last words were in response to their question, 'How are you feeling?' To which Baxter replied, 'Almost well.'" When he died, he didn't feel almost well, he was fine.

Sometimes we go to pray with people and they -- they die. I've joked often times if you don't want to live, call me to the hospital and pray for you. I seem to have a Midas touch. It's a joke, sort of. But sometimes people say, "Well, we prayed so much and we prayed that they would be healed and they died." To which I reply, "Completely healed." You don't get any more healed than that. Otherwise you're just delaying the obvious.

Faith to receive, obedience to call upon His name, joyful service in the presence of others, and an anticipatory attitude towards one day having to stand before God. That's what God's looking for from you. That's how you can repay Him for His goodness. That's how you can respond to His love.

And the Psalmist ends with a couple of verses about devotion by saying in verse 16, "Truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant." He said it twice, Lord. "And I am the son of Your maidservant." In the Old Testament, a bond servant was someone who had been taken as a slave for whatever purpose; to pay off a debt, captured in battle. 100 different ways. But at some point, he pays off his debt. He's allowed to go free. And he decides that the master for whom he has worked all of his years is a faithful and good master, and so he changes his shirt from slave to bond slave. I'm now a -- I commit myself to working for you the rest of my life. And he is marked as a bond slave: One who submits himself to slavery, if you will, to the one who had loosed his bonds. That's the word that's used here. True freedom is a relationship with you, God, who has delivered me from the

bondage of sin. "I'm Your servant. And I am the son of Your maidservant," which would suggest that at least this is a second-generation believer. It's harder sometimes when the kids are the descendants of the maidservant who loves the Lord, but aren't yet His servant themselves. I'm going to give you the offering of Thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord.

The thanksgiving offering in the Old Testament was part of the offerings called peace offerings. You can read about them in Leviticus and other places. They would always follow and never go before the sin offering. First sin has to be dealt with, then worship can ensue. And so the peace offering, when you brought it, would -- the priests would take the fat off the animal, the entrails. He put it on the altar. It would be burned up in your presence. The rest of the carcass would be prepared for a barbecue for you and your family, so that you would sit before the Lord and have a meal with God. Part of it sacrificed to Him, others given back to you. You'd share of that same offering. It was an offering of thanksgiving. The sin offering was completely consumed. I always think about thanksgiving as probably the only holiday that we have left that is developed solely on the premise of honoring God for His blessing. Pretty sure we don't have any others.

And he ends by saying in verse 18 and 19, "So I'm going to pay the Lord my vows in the presence of His people, I'm going to pay the Lord my vows in the courts of the Lord's House, I'm going to pay the Lord my vows in the midst of Jerusalem." He repeats in verse 18 what he had said in verse 14. I'm going -- I can thank the Lord by doing what He asks and doing what I've said. It's more than just good intentions; it is behavior, it is action. In the presence of all of His people, in the presence of the House of God, in the presence of the -- wherever I am.

You know, it's interesting that suffering isolates. If you're sick or in a position of who knows if you're going to make it or not, 100 well-wishers will not eliminate the isolation, because when they go home, you're still laying there by yourself. It's you and the Lord. Healing, deliverance is public. You need an audience to rejoice with. Grief will make you a hermit, but joy is sociable and Thanksgiving requires an audience. So I'm going to pay the Lord my vows, but I'm going to do it amongst everyone. In the church, in the streets, wherever you find me, I'm going to be living that kind of life.

It's a good Psalm. "Praise the Lord," he ends with. But the first step starts in verse 12. The receiving, the cup of salvation, it becomes the basis for everything else in the Psalm. Gratefulness, obedience, sacrifice and service.

I can't thank you enough. Here's how you can say it to the Lord. Here's what He's looking for.