

PSALMS

Chapter 116

I Love the LORD

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. 2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. 3 The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!” 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. 6 The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. 7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. 8 For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; 9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. 10 I believed, even when I spoke: “I am greatly afflicted”; 11 I said in my alarm, “All mankind are liars.” 12 What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. 16 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds. 17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. 18 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, 19 in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Ps 116 Praise of the Lord for deliverance from death. It may have been written by a king; cf. also Hezekiah’s thanksgiving, Isa 38:10–20); its language echoes many of the psalms of David. As used in Jewish liturgy (see introduction to Ps 113), the singular personal pronoun must have been used corporately (see note on Ps 30 title), and the references to “death” may have been understood as alluding to the Egyptian bondage and/or the exile. This thanksgiving song of seven stanzas (reading v. 7 with the following verses; see note on v. 7) falls into three main divisions (vv. 1–6, 7–14, 15–19), each of which contains a unified thematic development. (CSB)

Although originally generating from one person’s experience, this psalm was appropriate for Israel’s celebration of the Passover, as the whole nation nearly succumbed to extinction in Egypt (Ex 1:22). Luther viewed this psalm as referring to Christ throughout (AE 11:400). It is awesome to think that this was one of the last hymns our Lord sang before His “exodus” (Lk 9:31) on the cross. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–4, love for the deliverer; vv 5–7, the deliverer’s character; vv 8–9, the deliverer’s deeds; vv 10–14, the psalmist’s faith and thanks; vv 15–19, the Lord’s servant at the temple. (TLSB)

This psalm seems to be rather loosely related to the Passover theme of the surrounding psalms. It is an individual’s thanks for deliverance from death. It can be related to the sparing of the firstborn in Egypt, or “death” may also be understood as an expression for the flight of the nation in Egypt. The psalm does not have a distinct progression of parts, but circles around its theme several times. (PBC)

Although this psalm is not quoted in the NT as a Messianic psalm, nevertheless, because the whole Passover experience points to the work of Christ, it is appropriate to see this psalm as a reflection of Christ’s confidence that he would be delivered from death. (PBC)

Many passages of older Scripture are quoted in this piece, which clearly indicates that the writer was at home in the Scriptures in so far as they were available in his day. (Leupold)

The 116th psalm is a psalm of thanks in which the psalmist is joyful and gives thanks that God has heard him prayer and has rescued him for the distress of death and the anguish of hell. Like several other psalms above, it speaks of the deep spiritual affliction, of which few people know.

He laments in this psalm that things are so bad, yet he confesses his faith and the truth of God. He calls all human holiness, virtue, and confidence only falsehood and emptiness. This world will not and cannot hear nor tolerate. Thus it comes that the godly suffer, tremble, and fear all kind of misfortune.

Despite all, he is comforted by this, that God's Word is true and will only motivate us the more: "They give me to drink from the cup of their wrath. All right, then I will take the cup of grace and salvation and drink myself spiritually drunk and (through preaching) pour out from this cup on those who will drink with me and who draw their grace from the Word." This is our cup, and with this cup we will worship God and praise his name. We will fulfill our vows, namely the First Commandment, that we receive him as the one God and praise him as the only God worthy to preach and to be called upon. You find here also that giving thanks, preaching and confessing God's name before all people is the true worship of God. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

116:1–6 I love the Lord because he has heard and saved me. (CSB)

116:1-2 Simply states the reason for the psalm: the Lord answered his cry for help. The rest of the psalm elaborates the details of an individual who has been rescued from death. (TLSB)

The first two verses already tell the story of the psalm. The psalmist is devoted to thanking the Lord because the Lord has delivered him from danger. By remembering the past he receives assurance and dedication for the present and the future. (PBC)

116:2 *I will call on him.* In him I will trust and my prayers will ever be to him—a declaration repeated in each of the main divisions (see vv. 13, 17). (CSB)

116:3 *snares of death.* He had, as it were, been snared by death (personified) and bound as a prisoner of the grave. (CSB)

Psalmist was helpless in the grip of death. (TLSB)

116:5 *our God.* The author is conscious of those about him; he is praising the Lord "in the presence of all his people" (vv. 14, 18). (CSB)

Gracious ... righteous ... merciful. God's undeserved love, His perfect love, and His tender love are captured in one short sentence. (TLSB)

116:6 *simple.* The person who is childlike in his sense of dependence on and trust in the Lord. (CSB)

Those open to instruction. Cf Pr 1:4. (TLSB)

brought low. Augustine: “The pain which the physician causes by his knife is not penal, but salutary” (NPNF 1 8:555). (TLSB)

116:7–14 The Lord’s goodness to me and how I will repay him. (CSB)

Verses 7-9 also elaborate the details of the psalmist’s deliverance. The psalmist briefly reviews the help he received from the Lord. He was delivered from the physical danger of death, but also from the spiritual danger of excessive grief and uncertainty which tried his faith. Death and the grave had been relentless enemies who carried him to the brink of despair. He had felt crushed by great affliction. His distress was apparently made worse by false accusers who implied that he was getting the punishment his sins deserved. He realized that he could not count on men to help, so he turned to the Lord alone. (PBC)

116:7 *rest.* A state of unthreatened well-being (cf. Jer. 6:16; see 1Ki 5:4, “peace”; “quiet waters.”) (CSB)

Anxiety of impending death is removed. (TLSB)

O’ My soul. A conventional Hebrew way of addressing oneself. (CSB)

has been good. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is the same as that underlying “goodness” in v. 12 and so marks v. 7 as introductory to vv. 7–14. (CSB)

116:8 *my soul.* Me. (CSB)

116:9 *before the LORD.* In the presence of the Lord. (TLSB)

116:10 *I believed.* The author speaks of his faith that moved him to call on the Lord when he was threatened. (CSB)

Paul quotes this verse from the LXX in 2Co 4:13 to explain his motivation for proclaiming the Gospel. He speaks of the entire psalm and of God’s deliverance from death in general. In the narrow sense, this particular verse stresses that the psalmist held on in faith even while suffering affliction. (TLSB)

In 2 Corinthians 4:13 Paul uses the Greek form of verse 10, “I believed; therefore I have spoken,” as a statement of motivation for his proclamation of the gospel. (PBC)

I am greatly afflicted. This and the quotation in v. 11 should perhaps be taken, together with the one in v. 4, as a brief recollection of the prayer offered when the psalmist was in distress. The threat of death from which he had been delivered was brought on by the false accusations of enemies, as in Ps 109. (CSB)

116:11 *All mankind are liars.* The heart of the accusation he had lodged against his false accusers (for examples of similar accusations see 5:9–10; 35:11, 15; 109:2–4). Others interpret these words as a declaration that all men offer but a false hope for deliverance (see 60:11; 118:8–9)—therefore the psalmist called on the Lord. (CSB)

“They do not think correctly about God” (Ap II 34). All who do not believe are liars. Luther: “People become truthful only by the truth of faith” (AE 11:403). The psalmist recognizes that he will find no help in mankind. (TLSB)

116:12 *what shall I render ... ?* By offering to the Lord those expressions of devotion he desires (compare vv. 13–14, 17–18 with 50:14–15, 23). (CSB)

Psalmist ponders what God really wants. Aug: “This man seeks what he might return unto the Lord, and finds not, save out of those things which the Lord Himself returns [to him]” (*NPNF* 1 8:556). (TLSB)

Israel was freed from the chains of slavery in Egypt for a purpose, so that they could serve the Lord in the land he would give them. We have been freed from the chains of slavery to sin for a purpose, so that we can serve the Lord by proclaiming his glory in the presence of others. We can never repay God in the sense that we can do enough to compensate the Lord adequately for what he has done for us. But we can “repay” him in the sense that we honor him with love and gratitude which is an appropriate expression of thanks for what he has done. (PBC)

benefits. The Hebrew for this word occurs only here in the OT, but represents the same basic root as “has been good” in v. 7. (CSB)

116:13 *cup of salvation.* † Often thought to be related to the cup of the Passover meal referred to in Mt 26:27 and parallels, but far more likely the cup of wine drunk at the festal meal that climaxed a thank offering (see 22:26, 29; Lev 7:11–21)—called the “cup of salvation” because the thank offering and its meal celebrated deliverance by the Lord. See the parallel with “sacrifice a thank offering” in the corresponding series in vv. 17–18. Liturgical tradition applies this phrase to the cup of the Eucharist. (CSB)

May refer specifically to one of the cups of the Passover used by Christ in His Last Supper (Mt 26:27), or it may refer to the drink offering (Nu 15:10). The words “of salvation” do not suggest an offering but the receiving of God’s gifts (Ps 23:5). (TLSB)

Our celebration of the Lord’s Supper includes such remembrance and proclamation of Christ’s work for our salvation. In fact, all our public worship serves this purpose. Every act of public worship is a visible sermon which proclaims our thankfulness for all that God has done. (PBC)

116:14 *vows.* To praise the Lord . (CSB)

Luther: “For we can return nothing to God except the vows of praise and confession, for we have all things from Him and He needs nothing of our goods” (AE 11:404; see p 7) (TLSB)

The ancient Israelites often took vows to perform some specific act of thanksgiving if God answered their prayer. We seldom do such vow today. But on the day of our confirmation we did vow that each of our lives would be a fitting response of thankfulness for the salvation God has given us. (PBC)

in the sight of the Lord – Public worship is important so believers can be mutually encouraged. (TLSB)

116:15–19 Because God has counted my life precious, I offer him the expressions of my devotion. (CSB)

God cares about the life and death of every sparrow in his creation. How much more he watches over the life of his saints. He controls the life of each one of us so that its length best serves his

glory and our good. He will be with us to help us cross that boundary which is still fearsome to us. Our times are in his hands. Let us wisely use the time he allots us. Let us be ready to entrust ourselves into his hands when he calls us. (PBC)

116:15 *Precious ... is the death.* Not in the sense of highly valued but of that which is carefully watched over; cf. the analogous expression, “precious is their blood in his sight” (72:14). (CSB)

A saint is one made holy by God’s grace. All that happens to such a person is very important, especially suffering and death. This thought suggests the singing of this verse at funerals. Bern: “Let your soul die the death of the righteous, that your last end also may be like [Christ’s]... How can you live where you dare not die?” (SLSB, p 214). (TLSB)

The meaning of the word “precious” is not as we think of precious but is costly or weighty. (Gibbs)

116:16 *your servant.* This may identify the psalmist as the Lord’s anointed (see 78:70), but in any event as one devoted to the Lord (see 19:11, 13). (CSB)

son of your maidservant. Psalmist rejoices in his opportunity to serve the Lord and thanks Him for the faithful service of his own mother. (TLSB)

116:17 “He asks us to hope, and says that this is a righteous sacrifice, meaning that other sacrifices are not true and righteous sacrifices” (Ap XXIV 29). (TLSB)

116:18 Repetition (cf v 14) for emphasis. (TLSB)

116:19 *courts.* Of the temple (see 84:2, 10; 2Ki 21:5; 23:11–12). (CSB)

Psalm 116. All people are at some point “frightened to death.” Death’s grip is terrible because it is the result of our sin and separation from God. But this psalm reminds us that God cares deeply about our mortality and has released us from its permanent bonds through the suffering, death, and resurrection of His Son. • Let me walk in integrity, O Lord, and show forth Your love. Amen. (TLSB)