

THE SON DELIVERED FROM DEATH FOR GOD'S PEOPLE AND GOD'S PRAISE

Psalm 116

INTRODUCTION

This last week, in a bible study I am in we reflected on a phrase from the pen of the apostle Peter in his first letter (1:3) which reads: "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." Every person to whom God has given his divine life because of his mercy has a living hope. What does that mean? First of all, hope in the Bible does not mean what we usually mean when we use it. We say things like, "I hope I get a raise." "I hope the Brewers win the World Series." "I hope my mom doesn't get mad at me when she finds out I broke her expensive china plate." We use the word "hope" to express our desire, our wish that something good happen in the future but which may or may not happen. However, in the Bible hope means a confident expectation of a future good. Hope is the joyful anticipation we feel when we know for certain something good is going to happen. Biblical hope is like that feeling you have when you look forward to a visit from your favorite relative. It is like the feeling you have as you anticipate a vacation. It is that confident and joyful anticipation that the engaged couple feels as their wedding day approaches. Biblical hope is that attitude and emotional condition that comes from knowing that I have a bright future.

But what does it mean to say that our hope is a living hope? How can hope be alive? The answer to that question is to found in the second half of that verse which says that we have been born again into a living hope "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Our hope is a living hope because it is secured by a living Savior. Unlike the founder of every other religion in the world, our founder and leader is not dead but alive. Our confident expectation is that we are going to live forever with our living Savior. This is the glorious future that awaits every born again child of God, that is, every person who is united to the resurrected Christ by faith in him. So this morning we are going to look at Psalm 116 in order to discover why it is that all those who trust in Christ have a glorious and secure future. What is it about Jesus that secures for all who believe in him a glorious future? What has he done and what has God done for him that gives us who believe in him hope?

Psalm 116 is a prayer of thanksgiving written by a Holy Spirit inspired author some 1000 years before the coming of Christ into the world. It is a prayer of thanksgiving for God delivering the author from mortal danger which then, under the guidance of the HS, becomes an expression of the sufferings of Jesus and the glories that follow. The famous British preacher, CH Spurgeon said about this psalm, "...we can hardly err in seeing here words to which Jesus could set his seal—words in a measure descriptive of his own experience." And William Hill Tucker writes, "Christ is imagined by the prophet to have passed through the sorrows and afflictions of life. The atonement is passed. He has risen from the dead... and he proclaims to the whole world the mercies he experienced from God his Father in the day of his incarnation and the glories which he has received in the kingdom of his heavenly Father." Thus we have held before us in this prayer of the resurrected Christ reflecting upon his sufferings and his deliverance and his present praise the foundations for our hope in a glorious future.

MAIN POINT

All God's people have a glorious future because...

I. The Son of God suffered the terrors of death and hell (v. 3)

The chief suffering from which God delivered his obedient son is the suffering of death and hell. This can be clearly seen in v. 3. "The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish." Here death is poetically portrayed as a grasping, consuming beast which snares and swallows its victims. In v. 8 Jesus describes his suffering as inconsolable grief and as that of a man stumbling in exhaustion over rugged terrain. In v. 10 it was great affliction; in v. 11 he describes it as the panic caused by

the false accusations that were hurled at him. In v. 16 his suffering is described as a great chain which bound him and held him. The suffering of Jesus was not a light and easy thing. It was profound anguish and terrible affliction.

In the psalm we are given no reason for the suffering but simply a description of the experience of Christ's suffering. However there are a couple of connections to other biblical statements that help us see that the suffering of the Messiah was not purposeless but necessary for the welfare of God's people. In v. 10, the word translated "affliction" shows up twice in the glorious 53rd chapter of Isaiah's prophecy. There we read about the servant of the Lord whose suffering had a great purpose. Isaiah 53:3-7, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." Isaiah tells us that the reason for the affliction that was endured by the Son of God was us. He carried our griefs and sorrows. He was wounded because of our sins. He was our substitute. The affliction he endured is what we deserved. The horror he experienced was the horror that ought to be our experience. God afflicted him with the death and hell that every believing sinner deserves so that he might justly forgive us, count us righteous, make us his own children, give us his HS and thus secure for us a warm welcome into his eternal kingdom.

A second connection showing us the purpose of Christ's death is to be found in the first Christian sermon ever delivered. Fifty days after that first Easter Sunday, when Christ was raised from the dead, Peter used a phrase from this Psalm as translated into the Greek OT when he declares to the thousands of Jewish people who listened to him in Jerusalem (Acts 2:24), "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." At the end of his sermon, when the people were cut to the heart and asked what they should do to escape God's just anger against them, Peter told them to repent and to be baptized as the sign of their being forgiven of their many sins and so receive the HS and the promise of eternal life that can only be found in Christ. Thus, as in Isaiah, the death of Christ is viewed in Peter's sermon as substitutionary. Believers in Christ are forgiven and given God's own life and guaranteed an eternal home in the new heavens and the new earth because the snares of death encompassed Jesus and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of him. If you turn away from your sins and your own self-righteousness and trust the crucified Christ alone as the one who lived and died and was raised for you, then your future is bright and glorious.

II. The Son of God cried out in faith (vv.1-2, 4-6, 10-11)

In these 19 verses there are at least 11 references to prayer for deliverance. The thanksgiving that erupts in this psalm is because the Lord heard the prayers of his Son. Luke tells us about Jesus (Luke 5:16), "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." It was the habit of our Lord during the days of his earthly life to often get alone to pray. Hebrews 5:7 tells us about Jesus, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." As he confesses in v. 5, he knew that his Father was gracious, righteous and merciful. He knew that God would incline his ear to him and answer him because of who God is. In v. 10 he says that even in the midst of his greatest afflictions he trusted in his Father and his Father's promises. He believed God's word to him even while suffering and so he prayed. It is not hard to pray when all is right with the world and there is no danger, no pain. It is another thing to pray when faced with certain and unrelenting misery. To trust in the goodness and love and power of God and so pray for deliverance while knowing that soon you will be arrested, tortured and then killed on a cruel cross is amazing faith.

Here is a wondrous fact that is easy for us to forget as we confess the full deity of Jesus; he was also fully man and he lived as a man by exercising faith in the promises of God through prayer. He was delivered from every

temptation, including his final temptation to avoid the cross through his believing prayers. God did not take the cup of wrath away from him as Jesus asked in the Garden of Gethsemane but made him drink it down to the last drop upon that cross. Yet, God heard his prayers and delivered him by raising him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is God's answer to the prayers that he prayed throughout his life. I want you to think about the experience of Jesus. God did not save him from the cruelty of men or from the hell he experienced on the cross, even though he asked to have it taken from him. But God did answer his prayer by raising him from the dead after he suffered. I often think about these facts as I ask God to heal and restore my brain injured son, Jared. I know that every prayer I have prayed for his healing and every prayer that thousands of others have prayed for his healing will one day be answered yes. This will take place at the resurrection of the dead when Jesus comes back again. Jared will be delivered from his injury and all its suffering when God raises him from the dead because Jesus died for him and was raised from the dead. Every believer in Christ has a glorious future because Jesus believed God even when he said, "I am greatly afflicted." And because he believed, he prayed, "O Lord, deliver my soul!"

III. The Son of God was delivered by his Father (vv.7-9 & 16)

We have in vv. 7-9 the resurrected Christ describing the deliverance that God performed for him in response to his believing prayer. First, God dealt bountifully with him. It is not only that God the Father, by his Spirit gave life to the three day dead body of Jesus, restoring his full humanity in a now immortal, glorified physical body but more than that he gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue in heaven and on earth and under the earth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. There is no one and nothing in the whole universe more spectacular, more glorious, more noble, more awe-inspiring than the resurrected Son of Man. Jesus is now Lord over all lords and King over all kings. He will one day rule the nations with an iron scepter. By him God has redeemed people from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. All this is his because of the work of his Father on his behalf in response to his believing prayers.

It is because God has dealt bountifully with him that his soul is now at rest. The trials and travails of the incarnation are over. The suffering of death and hell is complete. Now Jesus rests completely in the joy of his Father's love and waits for that day when he will return to make all things right. Death has been conquered. As Paul says in Romans 6:9-10, "We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." There are no more tears for Jesus. He was a man of sorrows, but he sorrows no more. He wept in the presence of death at Lazarus' tomb. He wept as he anticipated the horror of hell upon the cross. But now he weeps no more for he has destroyed all the powers of sin and death and the devil. He has fulfilled the law and born its curse and thus emptied it of its power to condemn. By his resurrection he has been vindicated, he has been shown to be the eternal Son of God and savior of the world. Jesus is full of joy now as he sits at his Father's right hand interceding for his people, exercising his sovereign control over all things for the sake of his church. No longer is he staggering under the burden of the sins of his people on the way to Calvary. He walks now in the land of the living, in the presence of the Living God who alone gives life. All this belongs to Christ because God the Father heard his prayers and has rewarded him for his obedient life and obedient death for sin.

So Christ has become our champion. He has gone before us as the firstfruits from the dead. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. His rule over all powers ensures that no one and nothing can prevent every believer from inheriting eternal life. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ because God the Father raised him from the dead and glorified him. We now wait for his return when he will deliver us from the coming wrath. As the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:9-10, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." It is because God raised him from the dead and glorified him that we who believe can be confident that our future is glorious.

IV. The Son of God throws a party for all believers in praise of God (vv.12-19)

In v. 12 the resurrected Christ asks what it is that he can do in response to this amazing deliverance that God has preformed for him. The human author of the psalm declares that he will go to the temple in Jerusalem and there pay the vow he made when in distress by making a thanksgiving offering with both its drink offering (v.13) and its animal sacrifice (v.17). In vv. 15-16 he gives the reason for making the thanksgiving offering. He will make the offering because God watches over the death of all his children as a man watches over his most prized possessions. He makes the thanksgiving offering because as one of God's prized servants God has loosed him from the chains of death. Do not miss the connection that is being made here between the deliverance of Jesus from the chains of death and the fact that now the death of every child of God is guarded by God because we are his treasure. Notice also the communal nature of his offering. He will do this, he says in the presence of all God's people, which is exactly how thanksgiving offerings are to be done according to the Law of Moses. One of the key features of the thanksgiving offering is that the drink offering and the animal offering are not poured out by the altar and are not burned up on the altar. The one who makes the thanksgiving offering throws a party and all of his friends and relatives join him in a feast. The animal is cooked and eaten and the drink offering is consumed at this party which celebrates God's saving work.

Jesus uses the language of the banquet or feast on many occasions to describe that glorious future that belongs to every believer. Matthew 8:11, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven..." Do you remember what Jesus said on the night he was betrayed, while sharing that last supper with his disciples? Luke 22:15-16, "And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'" Jesus will share the memorial meal of God's saving work in heaven with his disciples. This meal is then described in John's vision of the future in Revelation 19:9), "And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" It is also described in Isaiah 25:6-9, "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'"

Some of my favorite memories as a child are of preparing for and then eating Thanksgiving and Christmas meals with my family. The house filled with the aromas of good food; the table covered with mom's best tablecloth and set with the good dishes and the real silver utensils retrieved from the special velvet lined, wooden box. Every inch of the table covered with savory dishes. My mom and dad and siblings and my aunt Jenny and Uncle Carol and my Grandpa all seated around the table. The laughter and delight in both the food and the family. Ah...friends, this is but a glimmer of the joy that awaits us at the thanksgiving meal that will be served in the new heavens and the new earth by our Lord Jesus.

The resurrected Jesus will lead his friends into a feast in honor of the salvation God provides through the Son. We will join Jesus in that banquet because God watches over us in our death as a person watches over his most precious possessions. Death died when Christ died and was raised so that now our God guards us as his treasured possession when we die. What a day that will be when we dine with our Lord in the kingdom of heaven with people from all the nations of the earth, celebrating the great deliverance that God has wrought through his son and for his son. We will be led in our praise by our Lord Jesus himself as he sings his Father's praise. What a day it will be to follow our Lord in delighting in and declaring the greatness and glory of our great God who has saved us by our crucified and resurrected Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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