

Thanking Our God for Total Deliverance!

Ps 116 (text)

29 December 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
I grew up in the North-West Province of South Africa – an area where it does not rain in winter!

Yes, it only rains in summer!

But wow, how absolutely frightening those years when it had not rained for months on end (and temperatures remained 38° Celsius and up), and the farmers – and even the townspeople – were on their knees crying out to God for rain!

I remember how, in such times, our churches would call for a country-wide day of prayer – a weekday on which many believers and even the hard-of-heart came to church. Then we prostrated ourselves before God, asking Him for the forgiveness of our sins, and vowing to serve Him fervently in days to come! And I have seen many a strong farmer praying with tear-filled eyes, for they were in dire straits!

And you know what? Amidst the heart-wrenching state on the farms, such moments of corporate prostration & supplication were precious – even beautiful!

Sadly, I also remember a month or two later, *when God had heard the nation's supplications and sent rain*, the thanksgiving services with their comparatively lower number of attendances!

That's sinful man! When the need is great, we seek God's face with fervour! We take time off; driving far; car-pooling to come together for corporate worship!

But, when God has delivered us from our pain, then, by comparison, our thanksgiving is at best a quick, private prayer, for we have other things to do!

Well, that's NOT the picture our psalmist sketches!

You see, he *sings* for joy!

Not just *that* – he *spreads God's praises abroad! He tells all his fellow believers!*

Why?

For God has heard his cries at the time of deep distress!

Well, my brother & sister, today is the last Sunday of this year (of 2019) – a day to thank God for His care and providence, and for having delivered many (if not all) of us from whatever specific distresses (worries, concerns) that entangled us in the past year!

So, today, like the psalmist, you & I give thanks to God!

And our sermon has the following three points...

- Distress
- Deliverance
- Thanksgiving

Distress

The psalmist tells about his terrible time of distress – an ordeal – from which the LORD has just delivered him!

He does not say exactly what that distress was. Yet, he vividly describes how he felt.

Perhaps, in your distress, you felt the same!

“I thought I was coming to my end. Yes, it was as if death itself was so close that I could, as it were, feel how I was entangled by its ropes!”

Indeed, the Hebrew word used in v. 3 describes the picture of being *surrounded/encompassed*¹ by ropes!

The picture which comes to mind is the state in which a worker in Indonesia once was when a large snake – a python – had curled all around his body, and had begun squeezing the life out of him!²

No wonder the psalmist continues, literally saying, the “tightnesses” of the grave have found me!”³

“But not only did *they* find me – no, *I* also found them as, *in depression & anxiety*,⁴ I aggravated my tightness, grief and sorrow!”

How scary when you’re so distressed that physically, psychologically or mentally (or in all these ways), you feel like a lion entrapped in a small cage!

The psalmist could not save himself! Disaster (even death) was staring him in the face. My brother & sister, has the past year found you in a similar state of physical, mental or even spiritual claustrophobia?

- Perhaps it was the frailty of your health which had you so down that you cried out to God for deliverance!
- Perhaps it was stress/distress at work – a new programme the management forced upon you; or extra training they asked you to undergo, and you just didn’t have the energy to even start on that!
- Perhaps it was relationship stress/distress between you and a dear friend (or your husband/wife) that got you on your knees!
- Perhaps it was the dark & sombre path you had to walk with your child – a path which, like that of the palmist, had you grieving with all the ropes of death surrounding you & holding you in a tight & claustrophobic grip! And, in your pain, you felt let-down, thrown-away and betrayed by a loved one – so much so that, in your *dismay & disillusionment*,⁵ you cried out the exact words of the psalmist (of v.11): “*All men are liars!*” (Or, as you/I might have thought, “Whom then can we trust?”)

If that’s *you*, what did you do about your distress?

Well, here’s what every believer does: Like the psalmist, he cries out to God for mercy! Yes, you call on the Name of the LORD (v. 4, also v. 1d, & 2b), and you say, “Please, Lord!”

¹ From the word *’āfaf* (אָפַף) “surround; encompass” (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 67). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

² Cf. video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azPeEPH_d2s

³ The literal version of what the NASB has rendered as, “*And the terrors of Sheol came upon me...*” (v.3).

⁴ This is what Matthew Henry has made of the Hebrew phrase in v. 4 which literally says, “I have found distress (tightness) and grief (sorrow).”

Says Henry, “*I found trouble and sorrow; not only they found me, but I found them.*” Those that are melancholy have a great deal of sorrow of their own finding, a great deal of trouble which they create to themselves, by indulging fancy and passion; this has sometimes been the infirmity of good men. When God’s providence makes our condition bad let us not by our own imprudence make it worse” (Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (pp. 909–911). Peabody: Hendrickson).

⁵ Hebrew *bəḥofzî* (בְּחֹפְזִי), Qal Infinitive Construct with 1st Person Singular Suffix of *ḥāfaz* (חָפַז) *be in trepidation, hurry, or alarm* (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 342). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

About twenty years ago, I heard an elder critiquing his pastor, “Pastor, why do you always use the word ‘please’ in your prayers of supplication?” “Yes, why do you pray, “*Please, O God, hear our prayer!*”? “It sounds like you’re trying to twist the un-twistable arm of the Sovereign God!”

Well, my brother & sister, look how the *psalmist* prayed (in v. 4), “***O Lord, I beseech You, save my life!***”⁶

See what words the psalmist used – “***O LORD, I beseech You!***”? In Hebrew this word (rendered as “beseech” by the NASB), is a very strong, almost untranslatable, sound. It’s close to what we call an *onomatopoeia*! Yes, it’s the sound a person from any language would make when he/she cries out to God in great anguish and earnest pleading! Here is what it sounds like: ‘*annāh!*’⁷ It almost sounds like “Ah, now!” in English! But the best we can do in written English is “I beseech You!” or “Please (!) O Lord!”

See? See that it’s biblically correct and fitting for God’s child in anguish/distress to cry out, “Please!” “Please, O Sovereign Lord!” “Hear my supplication!”

My brother & sister, what would you & I have done without our God-given faith – without our belief in the existence & care of the God who loved us so much that He gave us His Son while we were still sinners;⁸ Yes, what would we have done without that belief which, despite asking “*Why?*” is still there (and alive) even in times of deepest distress!?

Look, is that not why the psalmist – bang in the middle of his deepest distress – made this confession (in v.10): “I believed! That’s why I have spoken – yes, that’s why I have spoken to You, O God.”⁹

See?

By God’s grace, the faith of the distressed believer, though hard-pressed, is not crushed!¹⁰ So, what do we see?

Well, *that to feel crushed*¹¹ or *disillusioned*,¹² and to say so, even in the wild tones of *panic*,¹³ is no proof that faith is dead; in fact, it may even be the very sign of its *survival*...¹⁴

Do you remember the following words from the first stanza of Henry F. Lyte’s hymn, “Abide with me”? Here’s how it goes...

⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ps 116:4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁷ Hebrew אָנָּה interj. (from אָנָּה and אָנָּה, q.v.) a strong part. of entreaty, **ah, now! I (or we) beseech thee!** often sq. an imper.; Gn 50:17 (to Joseph) אָנָּה אָנָּה אָנָּה אָנָּה *Ah, now! forgive, we pray, etc.*, Ex 32:31 (to God); elsewhere always sq. אָנָּה or אָנָּה אָנָּה ψ 118:25⁰ Ne 1:5, 11 Dn 9:4. Written אָנָּה אָנָּה 2 K 20:3 (= Is 38:3) Jon 1:14; 4:2 ψ 116:4, 16 (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 58). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁸ Cf. Rm 5:8

⁹ Cf. 2 Cor 4:13-14, where the Apostle Paul, in the thick of hardship, quotes these words from Ps 116:10 when he says, “***Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak,*** ¹⁴ ***knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.***”

¹⁰ This faith makes up the *underlying attitude of the speaker, even though it is a faith hard-pressed!* (Cf. Kidner, D. (1975). [Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (Vol. 16, pp. 442–446). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

¹¹ Cf. v.10

¹² Cf. v.11

¹³ (NEB’s word for *consternation*, 11; see on 31:22)

¹⁴ My adaptation of the words of Kidner (ibid)

“...When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.”

Well, so far re Point 1: “Distress.”
Here is point 2...

Deliverance

My brother & sister, in the past year, if you have experienced the Lord’s upholding strength in your workplace...; in your family routine with its daily challenges...; if you experienced the Lord’s upholding strength re your health; yes, if you have experienced the Lord’s deliverance & rescue in the painful situation of your child – then come drink with me deeply from the heart and Spirit of the psalmist – and from his *words* – which reveal how intensely he has come under the awe of God, his delivering Saviour! Let’s start with Ps 116:1, “(The LORD) *inclined His ear to me!*”

Wow!

Did you notice in these words God’s readiness and willingness to hear His loved ones’ prayers?

The Hebrew literally says (that) the LORD lays (or *spreads out*),¹⁵ as it were, His ear to the mouth of the *prayer* (the person praying) to hear him even though his might only have been a whispered and silent prayer – yet, a prayer that got enhanced as *the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express*.¹⁶

What *condescension* as God, in *His* time (and on *His* terms) stoops down to accommodate the needs of His supplicant child!

Have you, in the past year, tasted such deliverance? Has God, in this manner, heard your cries and upheld you physically, emotionally and spiritually?

Well, then, let’s with the psalmist, remind ourselves and others of the fact that our Lord is (as v.5-6 say) *gracious and righteous*; that He is *full of compassion*; that He *protects the simplehearted* – simplehearted not in a negative sense (not in the sense of naïve and gullible), but in the sense of humble, *sincere, upright, and without guile*;¹⁷ yes, *simplehearted* in the sense that, by God’s grace and in your agony, you understood that you needed God; *simplehearted* in the sense that you cried to Him in childlike faith & implicit trust; and that you were/are open to receive God Triune on His terms and for His glory!¹⁸

My brother & sister, now look at this beauty! You see, reflecting on how God has saved him, there’s one very special thing the saved psalmist remembers about God, i.e. that *the death of His saints* (loved ones) *is precious in God’s sight* (v.15)!¹⁹

¹⁵ Hebrew: *hiṭṭāh* (הִטָּה), הִטָּה *stretch out, spread out, extend, incline, bend* (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 639). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹⁶ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Ro 8:26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁷ Words well-chosen by Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (pp. 909–911). Peabody: Hendrickson.

¹⁸ The Hebrew word for “simplehearted” is *pətā’im* (פְּתוּיִם), Masculine Plural of *pətî* (פְּתוּי), *adj. simple*, poss. as *open-minded*;*simple*, as subst. concr.: open to the instruction of wisdom or folly... (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 834). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹⁹ Verse 15, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (ESV; ESV84); *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones* (NASB).

What does this mean?

Well, it means that the death of God's loved ones is costly to Him – in the sense that He would, for example, not gratify David's enemies (yes, not *Saul*, neither *Absalom*, nor *any of David's enemies*) with David's death!²⁰ Indeed, God would not allow for David's enemies the pleasure of killing him! In fact, so costly is the death of His saints to Him that our Lord Jesus once told the Scribes and Pharisees that upon them would come all the righteous blood of God's prophets – **yes, *all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah...***²¹

You ask, “But why is the death of God's saints *no small matter in His sight!*?”²²

Well, the answer must be: “Because, in His Son's cross-death, God paid the highest price for them!”

My brother & sister, this truth now begs the question: “But if my death is costly (no small matter) to the Lord – yes, if the Lord would not willy-nilly let any Tom, Dick & Harry finish my life on earth, but instead cares to spare my life; yes, if He even caused His Son to die for my life – what is then the *reason* for my living? Yes, *to what purpose* has God then delivered me, upheld me and answered my cries?

Well, certainly NOT that I should now go and spend the rest of my life selfishly...

No, but (as v.9 says), so that, ***in the land of the living, I will walk about***²³ (spend every part of my life) ***before the Lord*** – i.e. to the honour & glory of My Deliverer!

Yes, the rescued man/woman will now be a living witness of the Lord's goodness, mercy & love!

My brother & sister, if an Old-Testament saint committed himself to God in awe of *temporary* deliverance (great as that was), how much more reason for you & me, to commit ourselves to God for not only answering our prayers about our crises of 2019, but for His costly deliverance of us in Jesus Christ!?

Yes, how much more reason do you & I have to sing out the very first line of this psalm: “I love the LORD, because He heard my voice!”

So, what is the most fitting way to respond to our God and Saviour?

Well, that brings us to the last point...

Thanksgiving

My brother & sister, so overjoyed & thankful is the psalmist that he uses three different words to describe his deliverance. Yes, if you & I wanted to do the same in English, we might burst out, joyfully saying: “God *delivered*²⁴ me; He *saved*²⁵ me; He *rescued*²⁶ me!

²⁰ Cf. Matthew Henry, “He will always entertain good thoughts of God, as very tender of the lives and comforts of his people (v. 15): *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*, so precious that he will not gratify Saul, nor Absalom, nor any of David's enemies, with his death, how earnestly soever they desire it” (Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 909–911). Peabody: Hendrickson).

²¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 23:35). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²² The way verse 15 has been rendered in the 1983 Afrikaans translation, “***Vir die Here is die dood van sy troue dienaars geen geringe saak nie***” (i.e. “To the LORD, the death of His faithful servants is no small matter”). For the Afrikaans version cf. e.g. <https://www.bible.com/af/bible/6/PSA.116.AFR83>

²³ The Hebrew verb form *'ethallekh* (אָתְּהֵלְךָ) is in the Hitpa`el Pattern, which means that we should not simply render it as “walk,” but as “walk *about*,” i.e. describing my walking at large (my whole life's walk)!

²⁴ Cf. v.4b, “***O Lord, I pray, deliver*** (malləṭāh – מַלְלָטָה) ***my soul!***”

²⁵ Cf. v.6b, “***...when I was brought low, he saved*** (yəhōšî'ā – יְהוֹשִׁיעַ) ***me.***”

²⁶ Cf. v.8a, “***For you have rescued*** (hilləṣṭā – הִלְלַצְתָּ) ***my soul from death...***”

Indeed, (as v. 8 suggests), “My whole person has been saved – yes, from head to toe I have been rescued!”²⁷ (Body & soul in Christ, my Saviour)!

So, here is what I will do for the rest of my life...²⁸

(Verse 13), ***I will lift up the cup of salvation.***

My brother & sister, by this, the psalmist means: “O God of my salvation, I will offer the drink-offerings²⁹ which You, in Your Law, have prescribed for all who have tasted Your saving power!” “And, LORD, I will not bring this drink-offering in private!” “No, to publicly spread abroad Your great saving deeds, I will do this drink-offering *in the presence of all Your people* (v.14, 18); “yes, in Your house, O LORD (v.19)! “Thus, by publicly lifting up my cup of salvation, the saints and I will rejoice together in Your goodness”³⁰ remembering that for us to be able to lift up this salvation cup, You caused Your Son to lift up the cup of Your wrath even though He cried out, “***Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.***”³¹

My brother & sister, I realise that in our churches, for the sake of order and reverence, we do not have the custom of having congregation members putting up their hands during the worship service to witness before us all of what great things the LORD has done in their lives! And, for good reasons, I accept that!

But, in *this* I rejoice: i.e. that many of you who have tasted the Lord’s deliverance in this past year were so delighted in what the Lord has done for you that you simply could not keep it to yourselves! You told your brothers & sisters in our church family! And you graciously entrusted your distress *and* deliverance to me and Annette! And so, as much as you were able, you shared God’s praises in the presence of the saints!

²⁷ Cf. v. 8, “***For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling...***” Cf. Tucker, who describes “my eyes... my feet...” as a merism, i.e. meaning, “...from head to toe” (Tucker, W. D., Jr. (2018). [Psalms 107–150](#). In T. Muck (Ed.), *Psalms* (Vol. 2, pp. 655–668). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

²⁸ Verse 2, “***Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live,***” i.e. my life-long resolve – cf. Kidner, D. (1975). [Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (Vol. 16, pp. 442–446). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

²⁹ Cf. Ps 116:17-19, which is a parallel to verses 13 and 14. Thus, the lifting of the cup (in verse 13) is paralleled by “sacrifice a thank-offering” (in verse 17). Here are the two passages:

Verses 13 and 14: “***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.***”

Verses 17, 18 and 19: “***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.***”

³⁰ For this interpretation, cf. e.g. Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 909–911). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Also cf. “As evidence of thankfulness, the psalmist raises a “cup of salvation.” Cups were used in various worship events and sacrifices, so the precise meaning of the “cup of salvation” remains difficult to determine. Yet, as Janowski has observed, the fact that the deliverance of the psalmist is linked to the raising of a cup suggests that the cup had a symbolic meaning; it is “understood as an elementary symbol of salvation from death and the continued existence of the one who has been saved.” In raising the cup, the psalmist also calls upon “the name of the Lord,” the very name he called upon from the depths of Sheol (v. 4)” (Tucker, W. D., Jr. (2018). [Psalms 107–150](#). In T. Muck (Ed.), *Psalms* (Vol. 2, pp. 655–668). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

³¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 22:42). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

And let's not forget the three people who professed their faith this year! After all, look: By that very act were they not witnessing here, in the presence of God's people, about their eternal deliverance in Jesus Christ!?

And so, today, together with many of you, I (and we as the Wainui church family), rejoice in the Lord's many acts of deliverance in our lives!

What now?

Well, let us remember one last thing – verse 16! Yes, I pray that we all will vow from the heart, “*O Lord, let others serve whatever master they will, but truly I am Your servant!*”³² *Yes, because You have turned Your ear to me, I will call on You as long as I live* (cf. v.2).³³

(AMEN 2,487 words excluding footnotes)

³² M Henry's comment on Ps 116:16, “***O Lord, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains***” (Cf. Henry, *ibid*).

³³ Ps 116:2, “***Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.***”