

My father always prayed that we would love Jesus. That our faith would not just be something inherited. It would not just be a cultural thing. That it would not merely be a religion. But He wanted us to love Jesus. Because He felt that if we would just love Jesus, then everything else would be okay.

I have come to believe He is right. It is how I talk about our faith to my own children. We are not Christians because we have accepted some tenets or beliefs, although we have. But because we love Jesus. And this love for Jesus fuels everything else.

But what does it mean to love Jesus? It is just an overly emotionalism? I have noticed men, usually old stuffy pastors who spend too much time debating one another over things no one cares about bristle when I talk about loving Jesus. They would rather discuss minutia. But the Scriptures tell us that loving God and loving Jesus are not optional. In fact, it is the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

Turn with me to Psalm 116

I. We should have an attitude of love towards Jesus (v. 1-11).

"I love the Lord"

This is how the Psalm begins.

And it is how our faith should begin.

With a declaration of love for God.

Not merely an inclination towards.

Not merely that we appreciate God.

Not simply that we believe the teachings of the Bible are correct.

But we actually love God.

Our hearts yearn for Him.

We follow Jesus ultimately because we love Him.

But why would we feel this way towards God?

Why would we love Him?

The rest of the Psalm gives a few of the reasons.

The rest of verse 1, **"because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy."**

When he has cried out to God.

When he has asked God for mercy,

When he has pleaded for help, God has listened

Think of a moment when you have been in distress and you needed help.

You can think of a small moment when you needed help out in public.

And a stranger comes by to help you pick up something you dropped.

It is such a relief and a refreshment, and the gratitude that we feel towards other people when they listen to our cries for help.

But here it is God who hears our plea and who hears our cry and who listens

Not in the small moments, but in our most dire times of need.

Verse two, **"Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live."**

Say it is not just that He listens.

It is that He inclines His ear.

It is like He is putting his hand around His ear to listen closely.

It is not just that God happens to hear.

It is like He is straining and working and putting effort into hearing.

There are sometimes that we incline our ear towards others and sometimes we do not.

If you are going by someone on the road asking for money.

We do not usually incline our ears to listen close to what they have to say.

Someone rings your doorbell and you can tell they're just there to sell you something we don't incline our ears.

But if you are out for lunch and we hear a table nearby and they're talking about something really interesting.

Maybe they're mentioning some juicy gossip about something in their life. Now all of a sudden we are inclining our ears to hear what is being said.

Listen, God inclines His ear to you.

He wants to hear you when you pray and to hear your pleas for mercy and your cries for help.

He listens.

And that should make us love Him all the more.

We should love Him and want to call Him as long as we live and cry out to Him because we know that He is listening to us.

Verse three and four, **"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!"**

Here he thinks of a moment and the psalm is praying about a particular time when he cried out to God for help when he was desperate, and when he needed God to show up.

It is the time when he felt like he was dying.

When the grave and hell itself is pulling up and getting its paws on him.

When he is filled with stress and anguish and at the end of his rope,

It is there he cries out to God.

He cried out to God for deliverance and for salvation and God brought it.

And God showed up.

If you have been a Christian for any length of time.

Whether, it's a very short amount of time or whether it's been longer than you can remember.

You certainly have a moment when you felt like you were in the snares of death, literally or metaphorically.

And you can remember crying out to God and you can remember a way that he delivered you.

That deliverance from God that moment, and all the moments like it should lead us to have a greater attitude of love with God.

And if you do not know Jesus.

If you have not yet become a follower of Jesus.

I want you to know that He is listening.

You can call out to Him in your darkest moments.

And He will respond.

And He can save you.

Because He is so gracious.

Verse 5, **"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful."**

We serve God who is gracious, and we serve God who is merciful.

We do not serve a God who gives everybody exactly what they deserve.

And that is a good thing because we don't want what we deserve.

We do not deserve grace and mercy.

Well, we deserve as we deserve justice,

And we deserve punishment for the way that we wrong other people

for the lies that we have told

for the hate that we hold in our hearts

for the deception and the deceptive way that we have lived.

And yet we serve a God who is gracious

And Jesus is eminently gracious.

Grace means He gives us what we do not deserve.

Every moment that you have breath, you have because Jesus has put air in your lungs.

He does not owe it to you and yet He graciously gives it to us.

God in His grace causes His rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous He shows his abundant grace daily.

And He is also merciful that He holds back what we deserve.

He holds back the punishment of death.

For the wages of sin or death and yet God does not bring it to us at the moment that we soon.

God does not bring consequences against us for every act that we commit and every wrong thing that we think and every wrong thing that we say.

And the more that we understand, the grace and the mercy of Jesus.

The more that you understand the grace and the mercy of God, even throughout the entire old testament, it is filled with stories of God's grace. It is filled with stories of God's mercy.

And the more that you recognize the grace and mercy of God, not just generally not just intellectually but the way that He has been gracious and merciful to you the more you will grow in an attitude of love for God.

And just contemplating the mercy and the grace of God does not lead to an increase of love in your life for Jesus and you have not understood His mercy or His grace yet.

Cause I don't know how you can behold even a glimpse of the mercy of Jesus and the grace of Jesus and not be filled with love.

If you aren't a Christian yet, it is probably because you haven't yet felt His mercy or grace.

Or understood how merciful He is.

We also have an attitude of towards Jesus because of mercy and it is Grace. He brings a salvation.

Verse six, **"The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me."**

He loves the Lord because he has been saved.

God loves and God saves, and God cares for even the simple people.

It doesn't just mean like a simple, humble, normal folks.

God saves the insignificant and the low and the dumb and the foolish people like me.

That even when we were low, even when we were dead in our sins, even when we had nothing at all to offer to Jesus or to offer to God, He saves us and He preserves us.

You do not have to be someone great.

Or someone well put together.

Or someone who is really good.

You can be just a simple fool.

You can be as low as you can get.

And Jesus can and does save.

Verse seven, **"Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you."**

It is a call to the soul to remember love.

To return to the rest that can only truly be found in Jesus.

The scriptures in Hebrews just describe salvation as eternal rest.

There are days when you just can't sleep.

You wake up earlier than you want to.

Your restless, and you lay down and wish you could fall right asleep and you can't.

You fall asleep when you don't want to, and you never quite feel rested.

Jesus promises the true rest, not just that our bodies need, but that our souls need

And that rest can only be found in Jesus.

The rest our souls long for can be found in Christ.

And we need to return to root ourselves in the rest of the Jesus offers.

To remember the great bountiful way that He has dealt with us and loved us and cared for us.

Because Jesus is the only one who has treated us this way.

We cannot find rest anywhere outside of Him.
No matter how much we try.

Verse eight, **"For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;"**

And the salvation of Jesus brings is saving our souls from death.
It's not just our bodies from the death and the decay that comes, but our eternal souls from eternal death. Jesus and God have delivered us.
We put our faith in our trust in Him.
That is a reason to love Him, and that is a reason to celebrate.

He has delivered our eyes from tears.
Doesn't mean that Christian's don't cry.
Doesn't mean things aren't hard.
That's not what we're saying.
But we are saying is that Jesus and God have delivered us from the tears and the despair that could overwhelm us.
And so we love Him.

He's delivered our feet from stumbling that no longer do we fall over ourselves and make a mess of our lives.
No longer do we have to be stuck in debt in our sins, but we can be alive in Jesus.

Nine, **"I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."**

So now we get to in this life live as we love Jesus.
We need to walk in the land of the living and walk before the Lord boldly without shame.
I've shared it before.
But the only reason I am alive is because of Jesus.
I was ready for it to end.
But I gave my life to Jesus as a last ditch attempt at life.
And only because of Him am I in the land of the living.

Verse 10, *"I believed, even when I spoke: 'I am greatly afflicted'; ¹¹ I said in my alarm, 'All mankind are liars.'"*

Hear the Psalm gets honest again and saying, I believed, and I trusted, and I love Jesus.

I love God, even when I'm at my lowest again.

I love God, even though things may not have turned out the way that I thought that they would.

I love God, even if He doesn't do what I want him to do or what I think that he should do.

I've trusted in him even when I have doubted everything else and even when I've been panicked.

That we need to have an attitude of love for Jesus, an attitude of love for God.

This doesn't mean that we like always have to be over the moon and overcome with emotions every time we hear a worship song or someone says the name of Jesus we just start crying because we just love Him.

That's great.

There are certainly seasons in our life that should look like that, but I won't be every day.

Yet, we should have a disposition of love for Jesus.

That is what it means to be a Christian.

It doesn't mean you show up to church.

Or don't drink, smoke, or have sex outside of marriage.

It means you are someone who loves Jesus.

II. We should act like we love Jesus (v. 12-19).

Because it's not enough to just have an attitude of love for Jesus or feelings of love for Jesus

We need to act like we love Jesus.

We need to then do things out of the love that we have forgot.

Because it doesn't count for a lot if we're just filled with all these great emotions and love and excitement for Jesus and then we never do anything about it.

Or we never obey Jesus.

That be like loving my wife so much I can hardly stand it.

But I never buy her flowers.

Or write her notes.

Or do anything she asks me to do.

If you love, then you act like it.

There are sometimes my young children will be getting in trouble because they have not obeyed.

They haven't done what I've asked them to do.

I'll call them over to have a talk.

And they know they are in trouble, so they say "But daddy, I love you!"

And I'll say that's great. I love you too. I'm so glad you feel like you can just shout that but we're not talking about whether or not you love me we're talking about whether or not you did what I asked.

OK, we can't say the same thing towards Jesus.

When he asked us to obey Him, listen to His commands, baptize and make disciples in His name, and we say "naw no thanks, but I love you Jesus!"

This is the attitude some have.

When they say things like they don't like Christianity, or organized religion, but they like Jesus.

Well, liking Jesus isn't really worth anything unless you're acting like you love Jesus.

So we need to act like it.

Verse 12, **"What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?"**

This is someone who has received and understood Grace.

The gospel as we understand, it is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins.

He died in our place so that we could be delivered from death delivered from our old life and given something new just by His grace completely free.

We don't have to pay we don't have to do something.

There's no way that we can earn it.

It's just given to us.

But because of these incredible benefits of Jesus has given us, it should make us not just love Jesus and say thanks, and then walk out the door.

It should make us want to reciprocate that love.

It should make us want to do something now because we think that we can pay for it because we can't but just to show our appreciation.

Verse 13, **"I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,"**

I'll pray that's one way that I can act in love.

That I can call on God's name and I can depend on God.

Ultimately, prayer is dependence on God.

And it is something that we do.

Something that we must do.

It is something that we need to do.

The life of a Christian doesn't mean we just kinda like walk around and we do what we want and then we are really stuck and we can't figure out ourselves then maybe we can go we can pray we can ask God.

God is never annoyed by our prayers.

He's not busy sitting on the couch doing some work and come OK I guess I'll help.

God loves you, He cares for us and He is merciful and gracious.

He knows you can't do it on your own and he is just waiting for you to ask.

He's waiting for you to making a big mess and to ask for help.

An attitude of love and action of love is to go to God for help.
And go for him for help not just for the biggest things, but in all the things.
We continually be relying on him and calling him.
If you love Jesus, then you will pray to Jesus.
You will continually be talking to Him all day.

Verse 14, **"I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people."**

This is repeated again in verse 18 word for word.
He is promising to keep His word to God.
He will do everything that He has promised.

Now we don't typically make these kind of vows today and we are not encouraged to make these kind of vows.
In fact, Jesus warns his disciples.
Don't promise things don't make a vow.
Let your yes be yes and no be no.
Be people of integrity who do what you say you will do.

However, we have made vows.
If you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have made a vow when you gave your life to Jesus to surrender to him for the rest of your life.

If you have ever been baptized, then you made baptismal vows, whether you called it or not.
You proclaimed that you were trusting in Jesus and Jesus alone for your salvation, and you claimed, and you promised, and you vowed to follow him.

And we do things a lot of the time as believers we might say oh yes, the Bible is the most important book in the world.
And then we might not read it.

We proclaim what we think Christians ought to do and then we might not do it.

But an attitude of love is one that keeps our word and does what we say we will do.

Verses 15 and 16, they kind of interrupt the flow and just get into some extra worship.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds."

This is not God saying that He loves it when His people die.

This is God saying that those who spend their whole lives being faithful to God and faithful Jesus and die faithful are precious.

So what can we do?

How can we have an attitude and actions of love for God.

We can live and then die faithful.

I tell you what over the years as I have gotten older I have only grown deeper in my appreciation for those Saints who have died faithful.

Because as the years goes on, and as time goes on, they continue to be more pastors who are unfaithful.

They continue to be more Christian leaders who are unfaithful.

They continue to be more Christian artists half the ones that I was a child and grew up, singing their songs or unfaithful.

Just recently, there's been the stories of Michael Tate from DC Talk and Newsboys, who not only has spent years while on tour leading people and worship to sing about Jesus getting drunk and doing drugs constantly, but was also grooming, assaulting young men by helping cover up the assault of women.

It's just a recent story there's so many like that.

It's almost to the point now that when I think about a Christian leader or pastor or musician, I haven't thought of in a while. I'm surprised if they're still faithful and still following Jesus.

How precious it is in God's sight if we die faithful.
Not if we're perfect, but if we spend the rest of our life enduring persevering and running the race.
That is something that we can give to God is our faithfulness.

That why he expresses this desire in verse 16.
Lord, I want to be your servant and I wanna be faithful.
I wanna follow you. I love you and I wanna live like it because of what you have done for me in the salvation you've brought.

Verse 17, **"I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord."**

We can also worship of God.

This is one of the things that we can do because we love him we can worship him.

We sacrifice our time to praise Him.

We sacrifice singing on Sunday even if we don't normally love to sing.

We worship Him by bringing sacrifices and giving financially.

Not because it is a tax.

Not because we have to.

But because we love Him.

And so we are happy to give it all we have.

Verse 18, **"I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, ¹⁹in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!"**

Gospel ending

If you have been listening and you are not a Christian.
Or maybe you have never thought about Christianity in terms of loving Jesus.

Then I invite you to come.
Come and give your life to Christ.
Come and see that He is good.
That He loves you.
Come and embrace this love.
And live the rest of your life filled with the love of Jesus.

Conclusion:

We should have an attitude of love for Jesus.
And we should act like we love Jesus.

When I proposed to Brianna I proposed with a giant list of reasons that I loved her. The last one was my asking her to marry me. That was a long time ago. We have had three children since then, married for over ten years. Which many of you know is not that long. But my love for her has grown over time. How much should our love for God grow? As you follow Christ, your love for Him should not grow stale. But grow deeper and deeper every year that goes by. Do you love Jesus? Because He loves you.