

# I love the Lord

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Preacher: Prof J.Douglas Macmillan

[ 0 : 00 ] That psalm which we read, Psalm 116. For our meditation in God's word this morning, let us turn to the first two verses, the opening verses of the psalm.

I love the Lord, says the psalmist, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

Real Christian faith lies not in outward religious observances, but in inward religious experience.

Not in outward religious observance, but in the reality of inward religious experience.

Where there is inward religious experience, there will of course be outward religious observance.

[ 1 : 19 ] But first and foremost, the very heart of what Christianity is, is the soul's experience of God.

And that fact shines out of almost every one of the 150 psalms that we have in the praise book of the Church of God.

You cannot read nor sing the psalms of David without being brought face to face with this fact.

That experience of God in every phase of life.

Experience of God in the dark, trying places of life. And experience of God in the bright, exalted places of life.

[ 2 : 23 ] Is the very core of what religion really is. I think that to know, to read, and to know, and to enter somewhat into the experiences of which these psalms speak, is the greatest deterrent to one of our greatest dangers.

The danger that our religion becomes merely an outward observance of religious ceremonies.

That fact shines through in the psalm. How wonderfully it opens. I love the Lord.

There, my friend, is the reality, the core, of what the Christian has as the very foundation of all his living.

I love the Lord. I think it's wonderful that God has given us these psalms because these psalms are the poetry of the soul's experience of God.

[ 3 : 51 ] And every one of us who has known God's grace at work in his or her life have our experience interpreted and explained, defined, and made clear to us in these psalms.

every one of them catches the notes of the melody of redemption. Yes, even the dark, sad ones.

The ones that speak of conviction of sin and of fearing before God as well as those that speak of peace and joy and blessing.

Every one of us, every one of them catches something of the melody of redemption. Because before a sinner can be brought to a place of peace and light and joy in the Holy Ghost, there has to be experience of the dark place and experience of conviction of sin and the holiness of God.

This psalm brings these two things out. I love the Lord, but then he goes on to tell us why he loves the Lord. I love the Lord because he heard my voice when the sorrows of death compassed me and when the pains of hell laid hold of me, when I underwent terrible experiences that made me cry upon God's name.

[ 5 : 42 ] He heard me then and delivered me and because he heard me and delivered me, I love him. I love him. This psalm was one of the psalms, one of a group of psalms that were always sung at the Passover.

It was one of the psalms, almost certainly, that the Savior and his disciples sang as they left the upper room and journeyed to the place of shadows, the garden of Gethsemane, the place where this became true in the experience of the man, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a very real sense in which it is peculiarly his son. And yet because it is his, it is ours too.

It belongs to everyone who is his. When we remember how he agonized in the garden and how he prayed there, as the writer to the Hebrews put it, how he bent before God and he was hurt when he

prayed with strong crying and tears.

When we remember that, the words of this psalm come to our minds. And the very fact that in it, in one of its verses, verse 13, the psalmist declares, I will take the cup of salvation, speaks of it as one of these great Passover psalms.

[ 7 : 40 ] One of the songs of degrees, I will take the cup of salvation. The Passover, in the Passover, the children of God look back to the redemption from the bondage and slavery of Egypt.

And in that they saw the redemption from a greater bondage, the bondage of sin. For Christ, the experience, I will take the cup of salvation, meant something utterly different to what it means for his people.

It was a cup of war and trembling for him. For us, it's a cup of gladness and a cup of blessing. I want to look at the psalm this morning, not so much from the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ in it, but the experience of those who are truly his.

Look at the psalmist. Look first of all at his present condition. Here it is, put very simply and yet very beautifully.

I love the Lord. what a confession. There are many and varied ways in which the Christian believer can confess, profess, his or her faith.

[ 9 : 18 ] But my friend, there is no higher confession of faith than this. I love the Lord. That confession touches the very core of our concern.

It touches on the reality of what our profession is. You see, to love the Lord rises higher than anything else that Christian experience can aspire to.

to believe in the Lord that is much. Yes, let me go as far as this. To believe in the Lord is salvation. For none perish that trust him. Salvation is this. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. To believe in the Lord is much.

Yes, to believe in the Lord is a miracle of God's grace in a human heart. But how much higher does this confession go?

[ 10 : 28 ] It is not, I believe in the Lord but I love the Lord. It goes higher even than to know the Lord.

To know about the Lord. To know the Lord is much. To know the Lord savingly is to fear him.

To fear him with a reverent, trusting heart. Them that know thy name shall put their trust in thee.

And yet, high as that is, to love him is even more than to know him. To love him is the result and fruit of knowing him as the God of love and the God of grace.

one could go on. This is the very apex not only of Christian confession but of Christian experience.

[ 11 : 41 ] My friend, he draws near to us this morning and testing with a severe test.

Testing the reality of our own experience and our own confession, our own living. he asks us this question. He asks us this question. Is this true for you?

Out of all your experience of life and out of all your experience of God, can you this morning lift up your heart and say, yes, oh, it's true.

Whatever else may be true of me, this is true. I love the Lord. My friend, if you have that, you have everything compressed within it that God looks for in any of his people.

why do I say that? There are one or two things that make this inalienably clear in the teaching of the gospel.

[ 12 : 56 ] The first one is this. To love the Lord is absolutely contrary to the heart of unregenerate man.

It is impossible for the unregenerate heart to use these words in reality. For what is the natural heart?

What is the heart of the man who has not, to use the words of Jesus, been born again? Well, according to the New Testament, it is this.

The heart of man is enmity toward God. As we are born into this world, we don't love God.

We cannot love God. Therefore, before you and I are brought to the place where we can truly say, I love the Lord, there has been a marvelous miracle of God's grace.

[ 13 : 59 ] and our natures have been changed and transformed. We have been born again of the Holy Ghost. We have been wrought upon by God.

This confession, this reality, I love the Lord, is the surest token of God's having been at work in the heart of any passion.

Do you remember Peter and Christ? Peter, after his denial of the Lord, yes, we can see his blasphemous denial, for he denied him with oaths and curses.

Peter must have wondered then about the reality of his experience and the reality of his conversion. He must have wondered, am I at all a disciple of Jesus?

And his fellow disciples must have wondered the same. And so his Lord took him and dealt with him in a particularly personal way.

[15:11] Go, he said, and tell my disciples and Peter. He singled Peter out because he knew that Peter needed special dealing. And when he came to that special dealing, oh, my Christian friend, do you remember how that special dealing went?

He didn't say, Peter, do you know me? He didn't say, Peter, do you trust me? He didn't say, Peter, are you repentant and sorry?

I'm sorry. He brought all this out by his one question that pished like a narrow to the real heart of the issue. This, he said, is what is really at stake.

He said, Peter, lovest thou me? And he said it three times. Peter, lovest thou me?

And he was so touching, the very quick of Peter's soul, that the repetition of the question grieved Peter. And at last, he burst out and he said, Lord, thou knowest all things.

[16:26] Thou knowest that I love thee. And that's the surest mark any one of us can have that our Christian faith and our Christian confession is authentic and real, the genuine article, the product of God's grace at work in us.

Yes, I may fail and I may be conscious of my failure in almost every avenue of my life. Yes, there may have been times when because of my denial I've walked in darkness.

Yes, it may be that even this morning I am following the Lord afar off, but yet it is true. I have to say with Peter, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.

So this is the very heart of our concern to be right with God. First of all, for that reason, that it is the product of saving grace alone to love the Lord.

And then secondly, it is the surest mark that we write in the real place for this reason, that it is the highest thing that God looks for in any one of his people.

[18:06] Let me repeat that. It is the highest thing that God looks for in any one of his people. God looks for much from his people.

But he looks above all for this, for the love of the heart. what is the highest requirement of God's law on every man?

Well, you remember how Jesus put it. One of these smart theological fellows came to him one day, and they wanted to test his mind, perhaps test his heart too.

And this he said to him, Lord, what is the great commandment? What is the chief among all God's commandments? And Jesus said the great commandment is this, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul.

God is the first and great commandment. This is the priority. This is the principal priority that God's law in all its demands presses home on the human heart.

[19:42] It's the first and great commandment. Really, what Jesus was saying was this, that the whole summary of the first table of the law or the first five of the ten commandments.

The first five speak of man's duty toward God and they can be subsumed, they can be put in one word like this, love God.

That is the first and great requirement of God's law. And you see, isn't it wonderful how God's grace, his tenderness, his love, his pity towards lost sinners who cannot meet his law, when his grace comes to work, it produces that in them which meets his own legal demand and requirement. Grace works in the human heart, that which satisfies the law of God. And the law, you see, is just the revelation of God's own character.

So grace works in the heart of God's people, that which is pleasing to every attribute of God himself. I love the Lord.

[21:10] And the next commandment Jesus said is like that one. It's its twin, it's its mirror image. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

This commandment I leave with you, said Jesus, that you love one another. And we can only do that. We can only meet the second commandment one.

When we have met, first of all, the prior one, to love God. How, says one of the apostolic writers, how can you love God whom you have not seen, if you fail to love your fellow man and your fellow

believer whom you do see.

So what a lot is met in these words, I love the Lord. This is the present condition of the psalmist. This is the point of great reality for him.

My friend, this is the point of great reality for you and for me this morning. And then, secondly, more briefly, this, we see in these two verses, not only the psalmist's present condition, but we see where that present condition roots.

[ 22 : 38 ] It roots in a past deliverance. Why does the psalmist love the Lord? And he's able to give us a reason for the hope that is in him.

He is able to tell us why he loves the Lord. I love the Lord. He puts it very simply, because he has heard my voice.

supplications. That might seem rather a strange reason. It might almost seem at first view a kind of missionary reason.

I love God because God has been good to me. but it's not a missionary reason.

The psalmist loves God because of God's benefits toward him. He loves God because of God's goodness, because of God's condescension, because of God's grace, grace, all put into this one thought.

[ 23 : 52 ] Verse 2, he inclined his ear to me. Literally, this is the figure of a mother bending down over her child, or perhaps someone bending down to hear the cry of someone who's so ill and so weak that they can only whisper.

They bend down to catch the cry. Have you ever pictured God like that? He inclined his ear and he heard my voice.

He doesn't say he heard my prayer, that's implied. But perhaps he was in such a state of soul desperation that it was only a cry.

It wasn't a real articulate prayer as such. Maybe it was only a cry of the soul. And I think that every real Christian here this morning knows what that means.

To be in the place where there's just a cry in your soul that doesn't even pass over your lips. It's the voice of the inner man and God bends down to hear it.

[ 25 : 11 ] And then there were times when David could voice his prayers and he could order them before God and he could call them my supplications.

Friend, there were times like that in your experience too. Times when your hunger and longing after God and your desires before them take the form of real supplication.

And is this true for you and for me as it was for David that our crying upon God is effectual?

Here is one of the ultimate tests. Let me say this, let me say it very carefully and let me say it very strongly. Here is one of the ultimate tests.

not only of the reality of personal faith, but of the reality of our whole Christian faith and religion.

[ 26 : 20 ] And God hears and answers the prayers of his people. And God himself would make it a test. He would say, prove me now here with the say of the Lord.

God, if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out my blessing upon you so that there be not room enough to receive it, ah yes, prove me.

What does that mean? It means ask of me. Are you asking of God? Are you asking for your own soul and your own soul's good?

God? And are you asking for the good of God's church on earth? And are you asking for the good of the whole bulk of mankind? Are you proving God daily?

and are you finding that the proof has been given fully to you? I love the Lord because he heard my voice and my supplications and there's one thing through for every real Christian here this morning, you know that God has answered your prayers.

[ 27 : 40 ] you remember the day that you cried for mercy. You remember the day that you sought God and wanted his peace and you remember how God gave it to you.

Well, God has not changed. He is still the same, prayer hearing, prayer answering and he will never change.

I found trouble and sorrow, says the psalmist. The sorrows of death compassed me, they gathered round about me, environed.

This was his environment, the sorrows of death. What does he mean by the sorrows of death? Well, we remember how the Bible interprets death in its deepest reality.

it is the wages of sin. The sorrows of death is the reality and the power and the fact of sin in all its ugliness bearing in on the human heart.

[ 28 : 51 ] Then the sorrows of death come. I don't think it's merely a physical deathbed or a physical drawing near to death.

Death always brings sorrow with it. death. But the deepest sorrow of the human soul comes when it feels its spiritual death and it knows that before God it does not live.

that brings to the pain of pain. The pains of hell got hold upon me. They were like hooks going into my soul.

sorrow. I found trouble and sorrow. This was sorrow not merely of a physical kind. It was soul sorrow because he goes on to say you see return to thy rest o my soul.

Verse 4 we find that it was the soul that was more the center of these sorrows than the body. for he says there I beseech thee deliver my soul.

[ 30 : 06 ] Most of us will have known what it is to have had bodily needs and bodily pains that made us call out to God for deliverance. Do we know something far stronger?

The fact of having not only a body not merely a body that's affected by sin and its fruits but a soul that is affected by sin too.

Well my friend this is what the gospel is about. Jesus too the saviour went through this experience not because of his own sin but because of ours and he went through it in order to be our deliverer because the highest thing that's said about love is this we love him because he first loved us.

That is how we know that God hears us. That is how we know that God loves us. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and that gospel supremely manifest at Calvary.

We love him. And Jesus himself said greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.

[ 31 : 35 ] But here is Jesus laying down his life for his enemies. For those who were in revolt against him. That is love.

love. And now we love him because he first loved us. Our present condition, if we can say this morning, I love the Lord, surely we trace it back to the place it roots in, his love to us, and our past deliverance because of his love.

And then we see his future in resolution. I will call upon him as long as I live.

Just a word. We can translate this more literally like this. I will call upon him all my days. Or I will call upon him in each one of all the days that he gives me.

As long as I live, I will call upon him. Well, isn't that natural? Or should I put it a little differently? Isn't that supernatural?

[ 32 : 52 ] When it pertains to God. It's natural when it comes to other men. We love people and we love to call on them, don't we?

We go and visit them. We want to fellowship with them. We want to talk with them. We want to see their love to us shining in their faces.

And we want to show our own love to them. Love seeks fellowship with the loved one. But this is the supernatural realm.

And there it is far more true. to know the love of God in Christ. And to know that love as a power that delivers out of bondage and darkness and sadness and sorrow.

To know that God hears and answers prayer is to be a person of prayer. What keeps the Christian believer living a life of prayer?

[ 34 : 07 ] There is one fact that God has heard him in the past and has answered him. There is your greatest confidence in going to God in prayer.

Hitherto the Lord has helped. Until now the Lord has heard. Until now the Lord has brought deliverance. So I will go on.

And where there is real Christian faith that knows its own love to the Savior. And knows its love to the Savior because of past deliverance.

That faith looks out into the future and makes this resolution. I will call upon him every day of all my days.

Sometimes we are afraid of what the future might bring to us. But my friend if it brings this if it brings the certitude of fellowship with God of converse with God if it brings with it the certainty that through every day as we call upon his name our gracious tender compassionate God will bend his ear to us then surely we go out into the future not with fear not with uncertainty not with doubt but we go out

with faith confidence and gladness yes I will call upon him as long as I live there you see we really have three marks of grace in our text don't we the greatest of them all

[ 36 : 17 ] I love the Lord and there's the mark of grace into which that one roots I love him because he delivered me in the death of his son and there's the mark of grace that looks to the days ahead and that says yes as long as I have days I will call upon him a 11 how do these things find us this morning are they reality for us or are they merely something the minister is talking about.

My friend, only you can apply the test. Please apply it this morning. Independence upon God himself.

And apply it until you too can use these words, making them your own. I love the Lord because he heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he has inclined his ear unto me, I will call upon him as long as I live. Let us pray.

O Lord, we thank thee that thou art the hearer and answerer of prayer. And we bless thee that the real experience of every one of thy children is this, that they know thee as the answering God, the God who is gracious, righteous, merciful in dealing with us, the God who is worthy of our trust and who in his dealings with us, captures our hearts and leads us in Christ into the way everlasting.

[ 38 : 35 ] Lord, we confess who love thee that we do not love thee enough, but we thank thee that we love thee at all.

Increase our love to thee by revealing more and more thy love to us. Seal thy word upon our hearts and give us to go out into this new day, resolving that all the days of our lives we will call upon thee. Hear us in thy mercy and love and grace. And in thy mercy, love and grace, pardon all our sins. For Jesus, our Redeemer, shake. Amen.