

Psalm 116

- 1 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.**
- 2 Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.**
- 3 The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me;
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.**
- 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!"**
- 5 The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.**
- 6 The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.**
- 7 Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.**
- 8 For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling,**
- 9 that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living.**

**The LORD is full of compassion.
He hears our prayers.
He delivers and rescues us from death.
He gives us peace.**

Do we dare even speak the word these days? That enemy that lurks in the shadows, has seemingly crept out onto center stage. Maybe if we don't say the word, it will avoid us. Maybe if we shield our eyes and cover our ears, we can ignore it. Maybe if we stand strong enough and convince ourselves that it won't come for us or for our loved ones, we will be ok.

But that won't cut it, will it? The thought lingers in the back of our heads. It makes our hearts pound. And so, we turn to distraction and entertainment, and that works for a while, but still, that fear finds its way back, that uncertainty resurfaces. Because this thing, this enemy, makes us restless, it makes us uneasy; and try as we might our minds still race, our hearts still get heavy, we are anxious to the point that sleep may be hard to come by.

What is the thing that troubles us so?... Its name is death.

That which troubles all of us at one time or another is doing its best to trouble all of us all at once these days. And so, what do we do? We can't just ignore it. We can't just pretend to shut it out or try to hide from it. Where should we go?

Perhaps it is best for us to rephrase the question or repeat the phrase that we heard on Wednesday night? To whom shall we go? And again, the words of Simon Peter ground us upon the solid foundation that is Jesus Christ, "***Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!***"

As those troubled by the thought, the fear, the reality of death, we go to God. We go to our friend Jesus with all of this! As Mary and Martha came to Jesus in their distress, we too come to Jesus. We come with hearts made heavy. We come confused, and hurting, and troubled, upset, weary and bothered as we come to Jesus, and he promises to hear us.

So let's do that right now. When we are anxious, when we are troubled, let's get in the habit of taking it to our Lord Jesus in prayer. And so we pray: *Lord, I am troubled by all the death that I hear and see around me. Lord, I am saddened that so many in this world are dying. Lord, I am upset that during this time of abundant caution I cannot go and be with those that are near death or grieve with those who mourn. Lord in this time of pain and uncertainty comfort me with your Word. In this time of fear teach me to trust in you! Listen to my cry for mercy! Grant me your peace! Amen.*

In faith and trust, we go to the LORD, and we love the LORD because he hears our voice. The Lord is gracious and righteous. He is full of compassion.

To be compassionate means that the LORD suffers with us. And the Lord is described often throughout Scripture as one who is full of compassion. Do not think for one moment that God is unaffected by what is going on in the world right now? Do not think for one moment that God is unaware of what is going on your life, or doesn't care about the pain that you feel or the fear that troubles you. He cares. When the people of Israel were bound in captivity and were mistreated by Pharaoh the LORD cared, he heard their cry and he delivered them? When the people were struggling in captivity and they felt like they were dried up and cut off and without hope, he gave Ezekiel this fantastic vision of breathing life into dry bones through the power of his word. And just as promised he would breathe life and hope into his people and rescue them. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth, he felt great compassion for the sick and the suffering, and he came near and healed so many. The LORD is full of compassion. He is gracious and righteous. This is who our God is.

Even though *our* sin brought with it pain and disease and death to *his* perfect world, God responded with grace and compassion. God promised to send a Savior who would deliver his people. Even as our world groans under the heavy weight of sin and death the Lord gives us hope that refreshes us so that we may endure this time of suffering and persevere until the day that he brings us to never-ending peace. And so we cry out to him in loving devotion, we trust in him, and proclaim his praise, until the day the Lord brings us and all his people to our heavenly home. Not because we have earned or deserved it, but simply because he loves us. Day after day, even in these last days, God shows us grace as he provides for our daily needs and graciously grants us eternal blessings as well. The LORD is gracious and righteous, our God is full of compassion. He invites sinners who are infected with sin and who cannot avoid or hide from death to flee to him and find refuge and peace in his everlasting arms. He calls us to faith and repentance and invites us to call out to him for help and strength and comfort and deliverance and he listens, and he answers, and he rescues and saves because he cares for us.

And so, in this ever-changing world, this is the unchanging reality for us as believers that brings us peace, now and in the days ahead: **The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Though we are sinners who have brought sin and death into this world, our God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. He does not treat us as our sins deserve but he gifts us with grace and mercy. He is good and righteous and full of compassion. Just look at Jesus.

Jesus once told us that if we want to see the Father, we just need to look at him. Look at how our God is so full of compassion and how he cares for us. As Mary and Martha came to Jesus in their distress, we come to the one who cares for us, and we see how Jesus wept. We see how he too was filled with emotion, sadness and even anger towards death because death is not some sort of natural thing but death it this awful product of mankind's sin and its curse. Jesus in his great love came to bear and lift that curse for us. He who wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus, who called his friend out of the tomb back to the land of the living, went to the cross to bear the brunt of death's pain and fury for us. And that same Jesus would trample death under his feet as he emerged from the tomb victorious on Easter morning. And thus because of his victory over death, we have the peace in knowing that those who die in the LORD fall asleep in peace. As Jesus said, ***He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*** And by faith, we believe this! By faith, we know this to be true. And so through our gracious Lord, through the power of his word, through the gift of Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can look at death and despite our tears and our pain and our sadness, we can say about those who die in faith, ***Precious in the sight of the Lord, are the death of his saints.*** Because through Christ Jesus, mortal sinners are washed and made clean and are set apart to be immortal saints, holy people who will not die and suffer without end, but we will live in the eternal realms of heaven with God forever and ever. How great is the grace of our gracious God!

And so in faith and trust in the LORD and we go to Jesus, and Jesus brings to us comfort through his Word. For the author of life is also the great conqueror of death. He is our rescuer. He delivers our souls from eternal death and comforts us in our present trouble, for he is the one who boldly proclaimed, ***"I am the resurrection and the life."*** And then went in and out the grave to show us that this is most certainly true.

These words of Psalm 116 are powerful. They are words are filled with raw emotion as the psalmist details the pain and trouble and the strife that death was causing him. He does not back away from the intensity of death and how it grips him and tries to put him down into despair and keep him there. No, he speaks of the power of death in gripping terms, ***"The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me, I was overcome by trouble and sorrow"*** But then take note of how the Spirit-given faith of the psalmist soars much higher, and share in this incredible expression of faith. ***Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!"⁵ The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.⁶ The LORD protects the simplehearted; when***

I was in great need, he saved me.⁷ Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.

Like a nightlight soothes a child afraid of the dark, so the light of our LORD, his goodness, his compassion, his care, and deliverance from death - even through death - calms our troubled hearts like nothing else can. Even better yet, the Lord tells us that we can call out to him with our prayers and concerns and through his word he will come near and speak to us with the reassuring voice of our heavenly Father, who calms our fears and wraps us up in his arms of peace. ***Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.***

As we approach Easter the Lord reminds us of the bountiful goodness that he shows to us day after day. Even as we go about our days observing an abundance of caution we can still see the abundant kindness of our God. Look out the window and see how the dead of winter has given way to the new life of spring, the snow that fell last night has melted, the grass is turning greener, the trees are starting to bud and sprout once more. There is life even in this shadow of death. The Lord is gracious and good. Look and see the goodness of God all around you. But most of all look to the one who the resurrection and life, Jesus the Christ. Search the Scriptures and hear the reassuring whisper of your God on every page. Look and see how your God came near and he cared, how Jesus wept at the pain death brings, and then watch as your Lord wielded his power over death and then marvel at how he was willingly handed over to death so that we might live with him forever. Listen to his words of daily comfort and eternal joy and be at peace as you daily call on his name. With the psalmist, we gladly proclaim. ***1 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. 2 Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.***

At one point later in this psalm, the author asks the rhetorical question, “**How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?**” and he answers by saying, ***I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.*** We have been set free to live for God in peace. We have been set free to love for God with a thankful heart. With gratitude and joy in Christ let us proclaim the name of the Lord all our days and live lives of thankful service as we praise our God and shine with the light of his love and peace. As those who are in Christ, we don’t have to live our lives under the dark and restless fear of death, instead, He gives us peace for our daily lives that we can share with others. Because of Jesus we can live each day in joy and serve each other in thankfulness, and then at the end of the day – or at the end of our life - we can lie down and sleep in peace, for the author of life gave himself over to death and the grave to serve us. The Son of God came to conquer death itself for you and for me so that we may have his gift of life eternal. Praise the LORD. Praise his name forever. For in his goodness and mercy he comes to us in our distress and he speaks these words of truth and peace to all of us, saying, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*** Amen! Yes, it shall be so!