

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Men's Bible Study

5 Great Psalms

Lesson 5

Read: Psalm 116

THREE QUESTIONS:

Q1: Read verses 3 and 4, which are rescue verses. Has God ever "rescued" you? Or, if not you, then someone you love or have loved? Would you tell someone else about this important time? How did God rescue you / your loved one and what did it feel like?

Q2: Look at verse 11. Have you ever felt this way - everyone is lying, nothing can be trusted, and your life is full of deceptions -- one after another? Notice at verse 12 - when the Psalmist says "bounty" it suggests that the Lord is not a liar -- because bounty cannot be built upon deceit. Can we always trust other people? Can we always trust God? Which is easier to prove or disprove?

Q3: In verse 18 what do you think it means to "pay vows?" What does it mean to pay "vows in the presence of all his (God's) people?" Why does it make any difference if the vow is paid in private or in public?

THREE INSIGHTS:

I1: Christian people have read Psalm 116: 13 - 17 and seen in them imagery and references to the last supper and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. When you read these verses, can you see the imagery? What would you write down as being the most crucial and important pieces of imagery? Some notes that we would make:

- Verses 14 and 18 are doubled - they repeat. Whenever something repeats so close in scripture pay special attention. Such repetitions are the Holy Spirit's way of pointing to something important. In this case it seems the Bible and the Holy Spirit think it important to say vows and keep vows.

- Verse 13 - where have you heard the phrase "cup of salvation" before?
- Verse 15 - can death be precious?
- Verse 16 - who or what does this verse bring to mind?
- Verse 17 - can we say that the crucifixion is a thanksgiving sacrifice?
- Verse 17 - what does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord?

I2: James Mays, the great Psalm scholar calls 116 a Psalm of thanksgiving. He says, "It is the praise of one whose prayer for help has been answered." He continues:

"The affliction that was the occasion of prayers for God's help is not identified. Instead, it is characterized. For the purposes of the song of thanksgiving, it does not much matter what the clinical or social particulars were. The song does not diagnose and record; it interprets and gives meaning."

What do you make of this: instead of assigning blame, the Psalm looks beyond to arresting the problem and meaning making on the other side of the sin? Is this what we normally do? Or do we spend great amounts of time blaming and shaming?

13: Again, James Mays:

"Though Psalm 116 was composed for use by an individual in a service of thanksgiving, it came in time to play a liturgical role in celebrations of the larger community. The text of the psalm required an occasion when a cup and a sacrifice figured in the rituals of celebration. It found two closely connected occasions. The first was the celebration of the Passover....According to the Mishna...Psalms 115-118 were recited in connection with the fourth cup (of the Passover meal), which had a ritual blessing of the 'cup of salvation.' The second occasion was the Lord's Supper. In the development of Christian liturgical practice, Psalm 116 came to be used in the celebration of the Eucharist, in particular and always as the psalm connected with the Communion observed on Holy Thursday."

(14: You should look at Psalm 117 before we move on. The shortest Psalm and shortest chapter of Scripture, it is short and little. But its call is universal. The call is not just to some of us, but to 'all you nations!')

LINKS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

L1: Here is a link to Hymnary.org, and Watts' great hymn written from Psalm 116:

[http://hymnary.org/text/what shall i render to my god watts](http://hymnary.org/text/what_shall_i_render_to_my_god_watts)

L2: Here is another link to same hymn, from cyber hymnal:

<http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/w/s/wsirtmgd.htm>

And a link to Wesley's same hymn title but set to at different tune.

<http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/w/s/wsirtmyg.htm>