

# I Love the Lord

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 4th of January 2004. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, I Love the Lord, and is based on Psalm 116. God our Father, thank you that you speak to us in the words of the Scriptures, even the words of those responding to you in the Psalms.

Speak to us now, we pray, that we may learn more about you, about how to respond to you, and that we may be filled with thankfulness for your salvation offered to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, as you all know, it was the maiden voyage, the largest ocean liner. It was comfortable, unsinkable, safe and secure.

But as we all know, one minute they were dancing and dining, and the next sinking. The iceberg had done its job, and several hundred were plunging to their deaths.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] The icy water, the lack of lifeboats, even Leonardo DiCaprio handcuffed to a pipe in a bottom deck or whatever. If you were plucked from the sea at the end of that film, as Celine Dion or somebody like her was, or imagine if you were rescued from Bam in Iran this week with its earthquake, after a few days buried in rubble, or imagine that you're pulled out of a burning house, or that you survived somehow a plane crash or perhaps a car crash, miraculously recovered from illness.

Then Psalm 116 might be your son. A friend of mine was dying about 12 years ago, or thereabouts, in England, and she heard the doctors.

She was unable to speak, a high fever, pretty much unconscious. But that night she heard her doctors say, there's nothing more we can do. And then she was overwhelmed by a sense of peace during that night.

And the next morning the doctors marvelled that she was not only alive, but the symptoms gone. Imagine if that was you. Then Psalm 116 may well be your psalm.

You see, the writer of this psalm has just come through a crisis, a significant, life-threatening crisis. Not just a bad day, but something that threatened to take his whole life.

[ 2 : 5 5 ] And the psalm is oozing with palpable relief of the writer of this psalm that he's survived, that he's been rescued and delivered from the crisis that was about to take his life.

There is an intensity of emotion in this psalm. It's not distant or aloof. There's a sense in which this person is perspiring with relief that the crisis that threatened to take this person's life has been averted.

It is a highly personal psalm. And yet also highly public. Because one of the things the psalms and the Bible generally keep on telling us is that what is personal faith is also for Christians public faith.

So this is a personal faith, very personal, intensely so, but expressed highly publicly, and rightly so.

For Christian faith is to be public and personal, but not private. So the relief is expressed in the opening verses. I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplication, because he inclined his ear to me.

[ 4 : 14 ] Therefore I'll call on him as long as I live. Now typical of many of the psalms, the danger or crisis is not described in detail.

We don't know that much about it, but we do know that it was severe, that his life was threatened. And we know more about his response than we do about the crisis itself.

The crisis is expressed in only vague or general terms, really. Verse 3 is it. The snares of death encompassed me.

The pangs of Sheol laid hold on me. Sheol's another way in the Old Testament of describing death or the place of the dead. What this person is saying, the two lines pretty much mean the same thing, is that death has got its hold on him or had its hold on him.

It was gripping him and the sense of the word pangs is almost as though it's stifling or suffocating him, strangling the life out of him. Not necessarily meaning that he was being strangled, but just that so close was he to death that he could say poetically that life was being squeezed out of him.

[ 5 : 34 ] That the snares of death encompassed him. He was surrounded by it. There's almost that sense of claustrophobic fear that his life was about to end. The pangs of Sheol laid hold on me.

The language almost evokes something like a snake that's strangling you, wrapping itself around you and crushing the life out of you. It's evocative and poetic language.

But on the other hand, we shouldn't underestimate the severity of the crisis here. This is a person who has felt as though and probably was literally almost being dragged into the grave.

And it's from that point of crisis that he was rescued and delivered. Now, what the issue was, we're not told. It might have been illness. He might have been 3,000 years ago lying on his hospital bed and hearing somebody say, there's nothing more we can do for him.

Or it may have been a crisis like a shipwreck or a sort of chariot crash or something like that. It may have been an enemy attack holed up by his enemies without any possible, humanly speaking, way of escape.

[ 6 : 44 ] We don't know what it is. That doesn't actually matter. What we do know is that it was severe. The death had its grip. He was about to die and yet was saved.

He says at the end, into verse 3, I suffered distress and anguish. They're strong words. Distress and anguish suggest, or the language of the Hebrew suggests, a very narrow escape.

Somebody who escaped by the...