

What Shall I Return to the Lord?

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, friends, I thought today that I would start with a little bit of fun, actually. Let me tell you what I'm going to do.
- I'm going to read you some declarations or descriptions of love. And they all come from a well-known English writer, a writer of English literature, in fact.
- And the first one who can get to me after the service and name the writer will earn themselves dinner at the reeds, cooked by yours truly.
- I'm a reasonable cook, so it's not a punishment. Anyway, here we go. Here's the first. Love is in all things a most wonderful teacher.
- Second, opening her eyes again and seeing her husband's face across the table, she leaned forward to give him a pat on the cheek and sat down to supper, declaring it to be the best face in all the world.
- [1 : 0 3] The third. You know what I'm going to say? I love you. Now, what other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell.
- But what I mean is that I'm under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire.
- You could draw me to water. You could draw me to the gallows. You could draw me to any death. You could draw me to anything I have most avoided.
- You could draw me to my exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts so that I am fit for nothing is what I mean by your being the ruin of me.
- But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good, every good, with equal force.
- [2 : 0 8] The fourth one. She was more than human to me. She was a fairy, a sylph. I don't know what she was, anything that no one ever saw or everything that everyone ever wanted.
- Wonderful, aren't they?
- Friends, such quotes about love don't surprise us, do they? Because we too love. We too enjoy love. We too have, I suppose, many of us made our own declarations of love or tried to describe our being in love to others.
- But did you know that while God declares his love for his people in the Bible, and while scripture tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, there are very few, remarkably few, declarations of love of God or love for God in the Bible.
- Not many people are said to love God in the Bible. And very few declare their love for God in the Bible.
- [3 : 2 7] And one of the very few declarations of love for God in the Bible is right in front of us today. Right in this psalm, Psalm 116. Look at verse 1.
- An anonymous poet, he isn't even willing to put his name onto this psalm, declares his love. Emphatically, he says, I love the Lord.

Friends, this declaration of love makes this psalm a very special psalm. So let's get started with it. And let's see what this lover of God has to say. Let's find out why it is that he loves God and can be so open in his declaration of love.

Let's find out what difference the love of God makes for him to his life. And let's learn how we too might love God. Hopefully, by the end, you might be able to join with him in declaring your love for God as well.

So, friends, some of you will have not have had this immediate application of this psalm for you. Some of you will not be able to immediately identify with this psalm.

[4 : 35] But I want you to come with me and just explore it. Now, I want to start off by saying there's some structure to this psalm. And let's join and have a look at it.

So, first thing to say, very different ways to look at this psalm. One way would be to look at how it is structured. I want you to notice some of these details of structure in the psalm. Let me show you. Look at verses 1 and 2. They are a statement of how God has responded to this particular man.

God has heard, he says. God has turned his ear to me. God has had an open ear toward me. Then verses 3 to 6. These verses describe the predicament from which the psalmist had cried out to God.

He was beset by a situation where he felt threatened by death. The cords of death, he said, had entangled him. The anguish of the grave had come over him.

Distress and sorrow had overcome him. And he called upon the name of God. The name of the Lord. And the Lord acted according to his character. He was gracious, righteous, full of compassion.

[5 : 43] He saved the psalmist. He acted and saved him. And then we move to verses 7 to 9. Verses 1 and 2 summarize God's responsiveness. Verses 3 and 6 describe what he responded to.

Verses 7 and 9 have the response of his servant. And what he does is this marvelous little thing. He engages in some self-talk to himself. And he urges his soul to rest in God and in God's goodness.

Now he says, I can walk before the Lord in the land of the living. In verses 10 and 11, the psalmist rehearses the situation again that he'd gone through. And in verses 12 to 19, the psalmist twice testifies to God.

He says, I'll lift up the cup of salvation. I'll call upon the name of the Lord. I'll do it in the presence of God's people. But there are some other details to notice in this psalm. There are repetitions of words, repetitions of sentences, of actions.

Look at verse 4 as an example. The psalmist is in trouble. And in his trouble, he calls upon the name of the Lord. Then in health, he does it again in verse 11. So first in trouble, then in health in verse 11.

[6 : 50] And then in rejoicing in verse 17. So there's a vague outline of this psalm. There's another way to look at it though. And that's the way I want to concentrate on today.

The other way is to let the first line of this psalm shape and determine the way we look at it. It's fundamentally, you see, a psalm of love.

It's called a thanksgiving psalm. But it is fundamentally a psalm of love. In fact, it's a psalm of thankful love. So that's our heading. And I want to explore the psalm under the heading of a thankful love.

Now, let's ask ourselves where thankful love arises from. According to the psalmist. Well, verse one makes it clear, doesn't it? Can you see it there? Thankful love arises from a listening beloved who is God.

Look at verse one. I love the Lord for he heard my voice. He heard my cry for mercy because he turned his ear to me. I will call on him as long as I live.

[7 : 53] You see, love for God issues from God's saving actions toward his people. But God's saving actions in turn issue from something else.

They issue from the very character or core of God. Look at verses five to seven. Listen to the words used to describe God. The Lord is gracious and righteous.

Our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the unwary. When I was brought low, he saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul. For the Lord has been good to you.

Now look at verse 12. It is God's goodness that he has demonstrated. Friends, the psalmist's love of God springs from God's love for him.

In his goodness, his grace, his righteousness, his compassion, God has listened and God has saved. So thankful love arises from God's character and God's actions.

[8 : 56] That's our first point about thankful love. Second point about thankful love is that it results in calling upon the name of the Lord. Now friends, this psalm constantly mentions the phrase or the title, the Lord.

Well, actually in the Hebrew, it is the secret name of God. That is the name by which God makes himself known to his people. It is the term Yahweh. This psalm constantly mentions the Lord or Yahweh, that special name for God.

When God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus chapter 34, he calls himself the Lord, the Lord. Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

And our psalmist remembers that. He remembers this God and he names him. Look at verses 4 and 5. Then I called on the name of Yahweh.

Yahweh, save me. Yahweh is gracious and righteous. Our God is full of compassion. Verse 13, I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of Yahweh.

[10 : 07] Or verse 17, I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of Yahweh. Thankful love, you see, arises out of the actions and the character of God.

Thankful love calls the beloved by name and calls upon that name and asks him to be according to his name. He calls on the character of God as God has revealed himself.

And it says, God, be as you are, as your name says you are. But thankful love does more than this. Thankful love finds rest in the beloved.

Look at verse 7. It's a great little verse. It's a delightful and relatively rare bit of self-talk that goes on in a person's life.

The psalmist turns to himself and he sort of gives himself a little exhortation. He's been sorely afflicted. He's despaired of life itself. The cords of death had entangled him.

[11 : 06] The anguish of the grave had enveloped him. He was overcome by distress and sorrow. He had no peace. But then he experienced God's compassion, love and goodness.

And he turns to himself and he tells himself, be tranquil. Be filled with rest. He urges himself that the love and grace of God is adequate enough to quiet all his troubles and give him rest.

So thankful love, you see, arrives from the action and character of the beloved God. Thankful love results in calling on the beloved by name and calling upon him to act according to character.

And thankful love rests in the beloved. But there's more in this psalm. Look at verses 8 and 9. Psalmist says, I wonder if you can see it.

God's great love delivers. And delivers so that those who are delivered might walk before the beloved Lord in the land of the living. That is, they might live in his presence.

[12 : 21] Thankful love walks in the presence of its beloved Lord. But there's still more. Thankful love does not just rest in the presence of the Lord.

Thankful love is also active. Thankful love fulfills its commitments. Look at verse 12. The psalmist ponders on what he might do in response to his beloved Lord's love.

And he engages in that self-talk as we saw before. And he asks himself, Now, what shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? Now, of course, the answer is that there is absolutely nothing you can do to repay God for his good and steadfast love and saving action.

You can never meet God with enough, as it were. But he's going to try. And he's going to try by fulfilling his commitments to God. Fulfilling his vows. Look at verse 14.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of his people. You can see it again in verse 17. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call upon the name of the Lord.

[13 : 26] Can you see what he's saying? He's saying, filled with thankfulness. I will dedicate myself to God and give of both myself and my property in the service of God and the thankfulness of him.

And that leads to the last response of thankful love. You see, thankful love not only fulfills commitments. Thankful love also gives of itself freely in the service of the beloved.

Look at verse 16. The psalmist says, Truly, I am your servant, Lord. I serve you just like my mother did. You have freed me from my chains.

You see, faithful love is a life defined by the love of the beloved. And it lives a life defined by acknowledging that he now belongs to his beloved.

Life is now going to be a life shaped by belonging not to himself, but to the one who loved him and freed him from the chains of death.

[14 : 28] He now has a new life that God has given him. And his whole life is going to be of service to this Lord who has loved him.

It is going to be loving him even as he has been loved. Friends, that's a wonderful psalm, isn't it? And I'm sure that as some of you listen to this psalm, you will identify with the psalmist.

That is, I know that there are some of you who in this past year perhaps will have felt what this psalmist has felt. That is, there are some of you who here, I know there are some of you who here, have found yourself in desperate straits this last year.

It may have been physical distress. It might have been illness. It might have been something close to an encounter with death or a threat of death. It may have been spiritual or emotional disquiet.

It may have been relational confusion and upset. And perhaps you, in the midst of this, called upon God. And you found him to be the God who listens with an open ear.

[15 : 38] And who rescues. And who saves. And who loves you. You found him to be the lover of your soul. And you experienced his rich goodness, kindness and love.

Friends, if that has been something you have experienced this last year, then I want to urge you to respond as the psalmist does. Love him back with abundant and thankful love.

Call him your beloved God. Tell yourself to rest in him. Live in his loving presence. Fulfill your commitments and vows to him that you made in those desperate situations.

Serve him. Love him. But friends, some of you will have not had that more immediate application of this psalm to your lives. You won't have been in those desperate straits this year.

Some of you will have not been able to. Some immediately identify with this psalm and this psalmist. But let me tell you. Let me engage in a little bit of what we could call Christian transposition of this psalm.

- [16 : 47] Bring it to you a bit more immediately. You see, I think that if you are a Christian, then you have experienced what this psalmist talks about. You see, as Christians throughout history, Christians throughout history have acknowledged this.

Anglicans acknowledge it by making this psalm, Psalm 116, the psalm that you read on Maundy Thursday. That is the day before Good Friday.

It is the psalm that you say before you remember what happened at Easter. Why? Because you know that what happened at Easter changes everything. And so on Maundy Thursday, you say this psalm to thank God for what you are about to remember.

Now, let me explain how this psalm is so helpful for Christians. You see, if you are a Christian, you have experienced, haven't you, the listening beloved God.

And you have experienced God to be loving, gracious, righteous and good, full of compassion and mercy. If you are a Christian, you know these things to be true. If you are a Christian, then you know that you were caught in death and entangled by its cords.

- [17 : 56] As Paul says in Ephesians 2, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. You were a follower of the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

You were by nature deserving of God's anger and wrath. And then God, out of his great love for you and because of his richness and his richness of mercy, made you alive together with Christ.

You became Christian. By grace, he saved you. By grace, he raised you up with Christ and incredibly, remarkably, astonishingly seated you with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

His great goodness and kindness overwhelmed your poverty and death and brought life and health. By grace, you were saved.

God's goodness drew you to him and you called on his name. You declared with your mouth, Jesus is Lord.

- [19 : 12] You called on the name of God's son and you were saved. You believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead and he raised you to salvation.

Friends, God's great act of grace caused you to call upon the name of Jesus and name him as your Lord. You have been where the psalmist has been.

But let me urge you to think even a bit more further than this. You see, in Matthew 11 verses 28 to 30, Jesus says these words. He urges you to come to him, the beloved.

And he says, come to me, all you that are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and humble in heart.

And you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Can you hear what Jesus is saying?

- [20 : 17] He's saying that in him and the cross that he bears, there is rest. And as you have experienced his salvation in his cross, so you too can engage in some self-talk.

You can quiet your soul and urge it to find rest just as the psalmist did. It is a rest found in Jesus and in his yoke of the cross.

But let's go on. You see, God's rescue in Jesus pushes us even further. God's love in Jesus pushes us in the same direction as it pushes the psalmist. It urges us to live in the presence of the one who has loved us.

To fulfill our commitments to him. To give ourselves to his service. To live lives defined by the fact that we have been bought with the price. Of the blood of his own son, Jesus Christ.

Friends, we who are Christians have experienced all that the psalmist had experienced and more. Our rescue is a greater rescue. Our delivery is a greater delivery.

[21 : 23] We have been rescued not only from the first death, but will be rescued from the second. Our named Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of the eternal God, who gave himself up for us.

Who brought us into the very presence of God himself through Jesus. Who enabled us to boldly march into his presence. Friends, if the psalmist was delivered from a mortal danger and could ask himself, What can I return to the Lord for his goodness to me?

Then how much more can we ask the same question? As we look upon the cross and God's love for us in Jesus, how much more can we ask that question?

What can I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? Well, let me give you some guidelines drawn from the psalm.

First, you can decide to live a life of thankful love. That is, tell God you love him. Tell him that you love him because he first loved you.

[22 : 32] Second, determine that your life will be a life of constantly calling upon the name of God's son, Jesus. For he alone is the way of salvation. Name him and call upon him.

Third, let me encourage you to engage in a little bit of self-talk. Tell your soul what Jesus tells you. Tell your soul that in Jesus and his cross there is rest.

Fourth, live a life of committed service to God. Lived in the service of Jesus. Friends, that's the right response to God's actions in Christ.

You were bought with the price of the blood of God's own son. So glorify him in your bodies. Live a life defined by who he is and what he has done.

But on this Sunday, I want to give you some practical things about what you might do. You see, an old mentor, a friend of mine, constantly told me he took me on when he was in the last years of his life.

[23 : 39] And some of you will know him. His name was Paul White. Some of you will know him as the Jungle Doctor. He used to, you probably read stories to your children or grandchildren from him.

He's a grand Christian man. And he said to me that he knew that someone had been truly converted when their wallets had been converted as well. In the Old Testament and in the New Testament, God's people constantly demonstrated their thankful love by giving themselves to God and by giving their substance to God.

The most important thing in all of this is to give yourself to God. And if you haven't done this, this is what I want you to hear today and what I want you to do today.

If you are Christian already, then respond to God's love by again giving a thankful response to him by giving yourself to him.

That is your true and acceptable worship. We've been working through Romans. That's what Romans says, doesn't it? In view of God's mercies, present your bodies to him. That's a true and acceptable and reasonable worship.

[24 : 52] But if you've already done this, then let me urge you to give of your substance as well. That is of your time, your gifts, your money. And today is the one week of the year where I focus in on money.

So I'm going to do it unembarrassed today as part of teaching you all of scripture. It's very important to do. I want to tell you that the ministry of the gospel here at Holy Trinity is under the grace of God thriving.

Each year for the last two years, our numbers have grown by about 7%. Each week now there are well over 600 people in church. My estimates are that there have been over 40 people who have become Christians in the last year across our congregations.

And that is so wonderful. If you've never done it, come along to one of the Chinese baptismal services. They are the most grand things. We fill the tub here with water.

And there's just one after the other after the other who go through and confess their faith in Christ. It is one of the most spectacular things. If you've never come, find out when the next one is and come.

[25 : 59] It's just something terrific. But it's not just Chinese who have been converted in our church this year. There have been English speakers as well. Ordinary Australian folk have come to know the Lord Jesus.

Our staff work very hard. They're pushed to the limits in terms of their workload often. And this ministry of the gospel needs your support if it's to continue to grow.

And as it grows, I want to tell you that the vestry is committed to any money that comes in, 10% of it being given to missions. Now, if you want more information about what the Bible says about this aspect, that is the giving of money and so on, financial giving, how you can do it here, I've written a little booklet called Gospel, Ministry and Money Matters, and you can get a copy of it from outside later on if you want.

You can find one out there. In terms of giving, though, the first thing I'd like to do is to tell you, if you haven't done it already, to do this. Commit yourself to God.

Second thing is, if you haven't already done this, commit yourself to regular financial giving. That is the most helpful thing you can do financially, is to commit yourself to a task.

[27 : 12] That is, to I will give financially. Today I want to give you an opportunity to give a one-off gift to an additional expression of your thankfulness to God for all that He's given you this last year and in Christ.

You were given envelopes last week. I spoke about them at the beginning of this service. There's more available this week. Please think and pray about whether you'd like to express your thanks to God in this way and then act appropriately.

However, let me stress what I've already said. And I know, friends, that there are many of you here who financially are not well off and this is why I need to say what I'm about to say.

Let me stress what I've said already. God is far more interested in you than in your money. And friends, as your pastor, I'm far more interested in you and your growth in Christ than in your money.

We want you to grow as God's people. Please give yourself to God in thankful love first. And then perhaps think about how that might affect the rest of your life, including your wallet or your purse.

[28 : 26] Let your wallet or your purse follow your thankful heart and not precede it. So find that first. And friends, that's about all I wanted to say this morning.

The most important thing is hear the message of the psalm. Hear what it says. I love the Lord because he heard my voice.

And God has heard your voice, your yearning for salvation, delivery from death, freedom for eternal life. And he has sent his son into the world.

Take that on board and live a life of thankfulness. That's what we want to celebrate today. And let that affect every part of your being. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Gracious God, we declare to you today that we love you.

[29 : 37] For though we were so distant from you, though we were in the captivity of the evil one, you saw our distress and by grace you saved us through sending your son to die on our behalf thank you that you have brought us to yourself and we here today offer ourselves to you in thankful love responding to your love please take us and use us please use our whole beings and our whole substance and Father we pray these things in Jesus name Amen