

Session 1

December 6, 2020

WALKING IN GRIEF

Psalm 116:1-9,15-17

No one is a stranger to death. Two years ago, my older brother died suddenly at his home. He was 58. I cannot describe the shock, pain, and sorrow we all felt, and none greater than that felt by my parents. How often I have stood at the graveside of children and declared that no parents should ever have to bury their children. So how do we get through those times when we walk through the valley; not of the *shadow* of death, but of death itself? How do we come out the other side of such sorrow, and still be whole? The psalmist reminds us of God's mercy and grace even in the worst of times...or better, *especially* in the worst of times. Three exhortations are offered.

We call to Him (vv. 1-4). Verse 1 literally reads, "I love, because the Lord..." then lists the reasons why his devotion is so deeply held, the most apparent of which is answered prayer. He "heard my appeal" (v. 1), and "turned His ear to me" (v. 2). Though both phrases reflect the same idea, there is a progression. He *heard me*, then He *inclined His ear*; that is, He heard my voice, then He paid special attention to my prayer. For that reason, the psalmist promised a lifelong commitment to continue his heartfelt appeals (v. 2). The second set of verses describes the circumstances that led to his prayers to start with. The terms used are graphic. He felt the *cords of death* entangling him, and the *horrors of hell* itself closing in on him (v. 3). As one commentator put it, "Death found me...and I found the trouble and sorrow that accompanies it." The cry he made (v. 4) is as desperate as it is succinct. These are the same words cried by the apostle Peter when he found himself slipping beneath the waves in Matthew 14:30, and the same prayer uttered by every sinful soul who sees his destiny as a place of ruin: "Lord, save me!" For reflection: *This prayer is not only for the repentant seeking salvation, but for all who stare death in the face and are looking for mercy. God really does answer prayer!*

We rest in Him (vv. 5-9). Why do we turn to our God in times of such grief and despair? First, because He is *gracious*. Answered prayer is not based on one's merit, but on one's asking! (see Matt. 7:7-8 and James 4:2). Second, He is *righteous*. That is, He is faithful to His own promises. Third, He is *merciful*, having compassion on the inexperienced (or the *simple* and *innocent*) (v. 5). Those who find themselves with no place to turn find *rescue* in Him (v. 6). Verse 7 draws the writer back to better days. Rest is possible because it was there before. Blessings await because they were in abundance before. Verse 8 recounts the enormous relief felt when deliverance arrives. Those who return from the shadow of death have their tears replaced with joy and their instability made sure again. There is renewed hope and a renewed commitment to the giver of life (v. 9). For reflection: *Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." How does that verse fit into the psalmist's plea for rescue?*

We submit to Him (vv. 15-17). Most of us are familiar with the King James translation of verse 15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." But the sense is not one of celebration when a believer dies. Rather, it is the extraordinary value that God places on His people. He is the giver of life, and the victor over the grave. Hence, His people are important to Him, and He superintends both their births and their deaths. Verse 16 confesses the great obligation owed to the Lord, by the one delivered from that which would have ultimately

destroyed him. He is a servant, but one who serves with joyous thanksgiving and who freely calls upon the proven name of the Lord (v. 17). For reflection: *What does this passage indicate about the sanctity of human life and the believer's attitude when facing death?*