Psalms 116 and 118
The Godly Response to Serious Trials and Distress

The last time I was here I taught on "The Comfort of the Believer", using the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 as a springboard.
Heildelberg Catechism, question 1: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?"
Answer: "That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him."

This is not intended as a followup on that message, but in a way it goes along very well with it. We will be looking at Psalms 116 and 118. While the author is not stated, I will assume that it is David because it fits his life so well.

The theme of Ps. 116 is verses 1-2 – "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

David had often faced severe distress and even threats of death.
116:3 – "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." ("Hell" is "sheol", here not the "Lake of Fire", but "the grave", the soul's place after death.)

118:10-13 – "All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me."

What did David do in these times? He called upon God.
116:4 – "Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul."

118:5 – "I called upon the LORD in distress …"

What is our response in trouble? To panic? To bemoan our "bad luck"? To immediately seek the doctor or other forms of earthly help? To find a willing ear for our complaints? What trouble is so great or small that we should not seek God for his help, guidance, and deliverance? The Psalms are full of examples of calling on God in times of trouble.

God's response was to hear and answer:
118:5 – "… the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place."

118:13 – "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me."

Ps. 91:15 says of him who sets his love on God, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him."

When we call on God we should fully expect his help and aid.

Ps. 78:17-22, 32, 41 Let us not provoke God by saying "Can God …? We are to trust in his salvation and "believe for his wondrous works", and not to "limit the Holy One of Israel".

What did David learn from these experiences?

1. **That God is gracious and merciful**
   116:5-6 – "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me."

We learn of his grace and mercy, not merely by reading about them (though it can be very inspiring), but by experience.

2. **That there is a place of rest for the soul**
   116:7-8 – "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

   There is still a place of rest for us, and Heb. 4:1 says "Let us therefore fear; lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Christ gives us peace and rest, even when faced with worry, stress, heartache, and turmoil.

3. **Confidence that he would not die but continue to live in this world**
   116:9 – "I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

   The land of the living is the here and now, not after we die.

   118:17-18 – "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death."

   Of course David died, as all men do, yet he had confidence that death would not come as a result of his present difficulties, but in the time and manner of God's choosing. Also that chastisement and correction is not meant for death or destruction, but to bring us to repentance.

   In the meantime, he determined to use his time to speak of God's deliverance.

4. **That we are tempted to become overly pessimistic in times of severe trial**
   116:10-11 – "I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars."

   He was allowing himself to be ruled by emotions. He was so overwhelmed by troubles that he gave up any hope in his fellow men. This is similar to Elijah's lament after fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel. He said "… I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 K. 19:14). Yet God said (v. 18), "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal".

   Even in the very worst of trials things are not as dire as they seem. We need to remember this.

5. **That God is concerned with the death of his saints**
   116:15 – "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints."

   Remember from the Heidelberg Catechism (in the previous message) that our comfort in life and death is, in part, that God "so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation." All men die, even you (!), and it will not come in some haphazard way. God is concerned with your life AND death, and it will come in the proper time and way. That does not necessarily mean that it will be pleasant, and at times even God's saints experience tragedy and horrible deaths, but we can rest in his faithfulness that on the other side of these sufferings we shall see the great and merciful face of Christ our Savior.

6. **That being a servant of God brings deliverance**
   116:16 – "O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

   If we are truly servants of the great God and our Savior, it is unreasonable not to expect him to be concerned about us and our ultimate well-being. What master is so unconcerned with his servants that he ignores their plight? The problem is that sometimes we are tempted to think he does not see or hear what we are experiencing. That is when we should be <u>more</u> determined to seek his face.

Heb. 4:15-16 – "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

7. **That we should not fear men if God is for us**
   118:6-7 – "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me."

   Isa. 51:12-13 – "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where *is* the fury of the oppressor?"

   Sometimes it is allowed that men should harm us, but our fear is to be of God, but Mt. 10:28 – "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

   Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) said "believe His love more than your own feeling, for this world can take nothing from you that is truly yours, and death can do you no wrong." (The Letters of Rutherford, chapter 13).

8. **It is better to trust God than men**
   118:8-9 - "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."

   Even well-intentioned men will sometimes fail us, either through inability or lack of resolve. It is good if people are willing and able to help, but if your trust is really in God, you will not be devastated when men don't follow through. (disappointed perhaps, but not devastated)

9. **That through God his enemies would be destroyed**
   118:11-13 - "They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me."

   David was a man of war and was fighting real armies of men, but even then his trust was in God to defeat them. In his private troubles against Saul he was determined to let God's purpose come to pass without "lifting up his hand against God's anointed". Today we should remember that we are fighting spiritual enemies, even if they are working through people.

   Eph. 6:12 – "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

   2 Cor. 10:3-4 – "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)"

   Rom. 10:19 – "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. "

10. **That God himself is our strength and salvation**
    118:14-16 - "The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly."

    We must rely on God, not on self-confident effort. He is the one who gives us strength for the battle, and allows us to overcome. The "right hand of the LORD" is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, also called "the arm of the LORD". If we put our trust in him, he will do valiantly on our behalf, and for his glory.

What did David determine to <u>do</u> as a result of these experiences?

1. **That he would call on God as long as he lived, and pay his vows**
   116:2 – "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

   116:12-14 – "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people."

   God is not bothered by our coming to him. He desires us to call upon him with supplications and requests. He is pleased, and Jesus Christ is glorified.

   Jn. 14:13 – "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

   Jn. 15:7-8 – "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

   We also should determine to call on God "as long as we live", not to think we are to old for God to work through us or to use our prayers for his glory.

2. **That he would offer thanksgiving as a sacrifice to God**
   116:17 – "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD."

   Thanksgiving is a spiritual sacrifice (as opposed to actual bulls and goats), but even here in the OT it was recognized as a sacrifice. We also see it in the NT – Heb. 13:15 – "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanke unto his name."

3. **That he would praise God for his salvation**
   118:19-21 – "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation."

   We can enter his presence through the gates of righteousness to praise him. We exalt the holy name of Jesus, rejoicing that God has heard us and saved us. Jesus IS our salvation.

   Ps. 73:25-26 – "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

   Ps. 50:23 – "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God."

4. **To rejoice right now, "in the day"**
   118:24 – "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

   God makes every day, but we live in the now. We need to be rejoicing in each day, whether we feel like it or not, whether we are in comfort or in adverse circumstances.

   Dt. 28:47 is in the midst of a catalog of curses that would come upon the Israelites if they did not obey his commandments, and it gives another reason for the curses. "Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;"

Conclusion

118:28-29 – "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

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