

Authentic Faith

Psalm 116

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I. PRAYER

- i. I pray that you would produce in our hearts a joyful, authentic, and voluntary desire to surrender our hearts, our minds, and our lives to you.

II. INTRODUCTION

a. This morning, I want you to do an exercise with me.

- i. Let's pretend each of us has a huge white board and on that white board, all of our honest thoughts and beliefs about Christianity are written on that board.
 - If you grew up believing in Jesus like me...
 1. Pretend all of what you think it means to follow Jesus is written on that board.
 2. Everything that you've always believed.
 - If you struggle with doubt, as most of us do.
 1. Think of all the things you are sure of written on that board and all of your doubts are written there as well.
 - If you're not a Christian...
 1. You have beliefs in regard to Christianity.
 2. You have beliefs and assumptions about what Christianity is.
 3. You have thoughts on what you find hard to believe about it.
 4. Pretend all of that is written up on that white board.
- ii. So, we all have our white board with our honest thoughts and beliefs about Christianity.



- So, in your imagination, grab the eraser and erase all of it.
 - I'm not telling you to throw all of that out...
 - But just for the next thirty minutes, let's clean off the whiteboard and start fresh.
 1. Sometimes you need a nice, crisp whiteboard to get some new perspective on something.
- iii. **And this morning, I want us to study Psalm 116 and from it I want us to reconstruct the foundations of what it means to believe in and follow Jesus.**
- When our white board gets cluttered with all of these thoughts and questions about Christianity, we run the risk of losing the core of what we believe.
- iv. **So, on your clean whiteboard, write the numbers 1-3.**
- We are going to reconstruct what it means to believe in and follow Jesus in just three steps.
 1. And the reason that I want us to be clear about these three steps is because if we lose these three steps...
 2. If we dismiss them...
 3. If we forget about them....
 - Then the result will be a distorted Christianity...the kind of Christianity that has been so dominate in America.
 1. A Christianity that is nominal, inauthentic.
 2. A Christianity that unbelievers find uninspiring.
 3. A Christianity that for those who grew up in it...become bored of it.



- So, I want to erase our white board and be sure that any definition that we give to Christianity would start with these three steps.
- v. **Alright, so let's go over to Psalm 116 and let's get our three steps.**
 - We read all of Psalm 116 for us earlier...so we are going to read it together again in bits and pieces.
 1. If you're unfamiliar with the Psalms...this particular book in the Bible is a compilation of songs and poems written to God.
 2. So, we have some Psalms that express praise and worship, some express anger, some are pleas for help...
 3. Psalm 116 is a psalm of thanksgiving where the psalmist is praising God for his salvation.
 - So, as we jump into Psalm 116, I want to first direct our attention to the way that the Psalmist opens and closes this particular Psalm.

III. STEP THREE: JOYFUL & AUTHENTIC OBEDIENCE.

a. Read v.1-2 & v.16-19

- i. When you look at this language, you do not read about someone who is bored or uninspired by their faith in God.
 - Actually quite the opposite.
 1. This sounds like someone who is all in.
 2. They are lifting their hands to God and they are saying...I AM ALL YOURS.



- In v.1-2 he declares his love and commitment to the Lord.
 1. I mean, it is easy to say with your lips that you love God and you'll always follow him.
 2. But, when is the last time in the honest depths of your heart that you have felt a love and an affection for God.
 3. If you're not a Christian, maybe even that idea sounds crazy or even fanatical to you...to actually declare love for God and lifelong commitment to God.
 - But at the end of the Psalm in v.16-19, the Psalmist is saying to God...
 1. I AM YOUR SERVANT!
 2. I'll do anything for you!
 3. I will sacrifice anything for you.
 4. You can have every single part of my life!
 - Okay, that is definitely fanatical right?
- ii. **But, as we look at these verses, we don't get a sense that this Psalmist is saying these things out of compulsion or reluctance.**
- No, this Psalmist is joyfully and voluntarily declaring these things to God.
 - There is an authenticity about his worship and desire to follow God that is almost captivating.
- iii. **I know as a follower of Jesus, there are seasons in my life that I wish I could have this kind of pure, simple, genuine zeal and love for God.**



- When we think about the effort that we put into following Jesus, obeying his word, worshiping him...could that effort be described with words like joyful, voluntary, authentic...?
- When we think about God and his holiness, his goodness, his majesty...
 1. Do we immediately open our hands and say...
 2. I am your servant.
 3. You can have all of me.
 4. My money, time, relationships, career.
 5. It's all yours.

b. So, what we see here is actually step #3.

- i. We are starting at the bottom.
 - So, on your imaginary white board in step #3, I want you to write the words:
1. JOYFUL & AUTHENTIC OBEDIENCE
- ii. And as we continue to look at this Psalm, we are going to see what produced this kind of joyful and all-encompassing devotion to God.
 - So, let's get back to the Psalm to grab steps one and two.

IV. STEP ONE: UNIVERSAL SIN AND DEATH.

a. Read v.1-2 again with me.

- i. Obviously, the reason why this Psalmist is declaring His love for God is because God listened to the Psalmist' plea for mercy.
- ii. And this brings us to v.3. Because v.3 describes why the Psalmist was pleading with God for mercy.



- See, the Bible is not afraid to declare the truth. Because the Bible shows us that it is when engage the truth, even when we don't like it, and not ignore the truth that we begin to see who God really is.

b. Read v.3.

- What we have here in v.3 is some incredibly vivid imagery about the reality of death.
- i. **V.3 says that the snares of death of death encompassed me.**
- The Hebrew here literally reads the ropes of death were wrapped around me.
 1. Imagine yourself being wrapped in rope and that rope was being pulled tighter and tighter until you were suffocating.
 - To this Psalmist the horror of death was a suffocating reality.
 1. Like quick sand. You start sinking deeper and deeper into the ground. The deeper you get, the tighter the feeling around your body, the harder it is to breath, the more you panic.
 2. The reality of the inevitability of death is inescapable
 - Have you ever had this feeling? Let's be honest we all fear death.
 1. We look at the decay of the world around us. School shootings that are out of control, wars, illness, poverty, abuse, assault, slavery, addiction, broken families.
 2. It gives you this feeling of helplessness. A feeling of suffocation. A feeling of constriction. What do we do about it?
 3. It's so inevitable.



- ii. The Psalmist then says that the pangs (or the horrors) of Sheol had ahold of Him.
 - Sheol is the Hebrew concept of a hell where one goes and is forever separated from God.
 1. So, not only was the reality of death causing panic in the Psalmist...the idea of the eternality and the finality of death was haunting the Psalmist.
 2. Do you ever think about the eternality of death?

c. So, before we move too quickly beyond v.3, let's jump off of this verse and go to the rest of the Scriptures to build a biblical view of death.

- Because as we build a biblical view of death, we'll have a greater understanding of why the Psalmist was crying out for mercy.
- i. If we start in the beginning of the Bible, we read of how God created everything and declared it good.
 - Meaning that there was no death, there was no sin against God, there was no corruption.
 - But as we get to just the third chapter in the Bible, we see death enter the picture.
 1. It is a direct result of Adam and Eve's disobedience to the Word of God.
 2. More than disobedience, it was really Adam and Eve seeking independence from God.
 3. They did not want to live how God had instructed them to live, they wanted to make those decisions themselves.



- And the Scriptures tell us that this broke all of creation and death was now a consequence of our rebellion against God.
- ii. But, this rebellion in the heart of Adam and Eve became a sickness that spread from them to all of mankind, including all of us.
- Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..."
 - We all were born with a heart that does not worship God as Lord and is corrupt with what the Bible would say are sinful desires.
 1. James 1:14-15: "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."
 - And just to make sure that we all understand that the Bible is crystal clear that every human being has a sinful heart that is opposed to God...
 1. Romans 3:9b-12: "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."



iii. So, if I already haven't convinced you that the Bible paints a grim and suffocating view of sin and death...to the point where you're asking yourself why you would even believe in this...it gets worse.

- The Bible teaches that those who are sinful, which is everyone, will be punished through spending eternity in hell.
- And we learn this from the mouth of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-33, 41: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left....Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

iv. There you have it. A Biblical Explanation of sin and death.

- When we look upon these things and if these things are true, we can identify with the Psalmist. It seems suffocating, as if we're sinking in quicksand, wondering how this possibly could be a part of our faith.
- If you are here this morning and you're not a believer in Christ. Maybe this is your problem with Christianity. This seems too harsh. How could God do this?!?!?



- v. **But, remember what I asked you to do earlier.**
- Take all your assumptions about Christianity on that whiteboard and erase it!
 1. Just do this exercise with me where we are reconstructing the faith on our white board through the lens of Psalm 116.
 - We have already added at the bottom “Joyful & Authentic Obedience.”
 1. A posture toward God where you joyfully say to God...I am all yours!
 - What I want you to do now is to write up there for Step #1 - **UNIVERSAL SIN & DEATH.**
 1. This means we have both step #1 and step #3.

V. DESPERATE CRY FOR HELP – v.4

a. So, let me ask you this. What would you do if you were caught in quick sand?

- i. If you were sinking into the ground and the sand got so tight around your body that it would be impossible for you to escape all by yourself.
- ii. What do you do in that moment?!?
 - You scream! You cry for help. You scream at the absolute top of your lungs hoping that someone, anyone will come to your rescue.
- iii. And that is what we see in **v.4.**
 - I need help!
 1. There is absolutely nothing I can do!
 2. The cords of death are wrapped around me and I am not strong enough to break them!



- Have you ever been in that place before?
 1. Where you were completely helpless, and you had no other option but to cry for help?
 2. If you're not a Christian, have you ever prayed to God out of desperation because you have nowhere else to turn?
- iv. Well, this is where the Psalmist is and we see God's response in v.5-15.

VI. STEP TWO: RESCUE IN CHRIST

a. But, look at v.15 with me first.

- i. Let's just stop there for a second.
 - Just minutes ago we were talking about the horrors of death.
 1. How death is suffocating and a consequence of our sin against God.
 - Somehow, this Psalmist has gone from the horrors of death and crying out for mercy to just 10 verses later using the word "precious" to describe death.
 1. Spoiler alert: Yes, the Christian faith has some hard truth for us to swallow when it comes to the reality of sin and death, but the core of our faith is the complete reversal of death.
 2. The Psalmist cries out for rescue and that is exactly what God does.

b. So, in the same way that we jumped off of Psalm 116 and looked at the rest of Scripture to build a biblical view of death, let's do the same thing when it comes to salvation.

- i. Look at v.5.



- The Psalmist says that God is both gracious and righteous.
 1. How can you be both at the same time?
 2. Our white board says “Universal Sin and Death.”
 3. So, we obviously all deserve the penalty of death for our sin against a holy, majestic God who is far more glorious than we are.
 4. God is righteous to judge us appropriately...but it also says that God is gracious.

ii. Well, let’s go back to Romans 5.

- Remember, we read in Romans 5:12 that death, guilt and corruption spread to all men through the sin of Adam, the first man.
 1. Romans 5:18 &21 (NLT) says: *“Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone...²¹ So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God’s wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*
- God, in his grace and mercy, knowing that he had to justly punish our sin to preserve his righteousness, made a way to rescue us by sending his Son Jesus Christ.
 1. He came as a human being and lived his life righteously before God.
 2. He was not like Adam. He was a new Adam.
 3. Therefore, Jesus did not meet the qualifications for death! Yet he still died.



4. Because God takes our sin that qualified us for death and he put it on Jesus. And he took the righteous life of Jesus that qualified him for eternal life and he puts it on us.
 5. Jesus faces the horror of death in our place. And God preserves his righteousness by justly punishing our sin, which was laid upon Jesus.
- iii. This is why Jesus, the night before he died on the cross, was sweating blood...because he felt the cords of death and the pangs of sheol.
- And all of this so that we can declare v.7-9!!!
 1. I no longer have to fear death!
 - v.15!

c. So, step one is “Universal Sin and Death.” For step two, write on your imaginary whiteboard - “Rescue in Christ.”

- i. What gets us from step one to step two?
 - Is it universal as well?
 1. Is the work of Christ applied to all people no matter if they believe it or not?
- ii. Well, look at v.6.
 - It’s clear in our Psalm that the Lord rescued the Psalmist after his cry for mercy.
 - Listen, becoming a follower of Jesus and being a recipient of this salvation is incredibly simple.
 1. It does not come through your good works.



2. It does not come through your knowledge of the Bible.
 3. It does not come through going to church.
- It comes through being self-aware enough to know that the cords of death are wrapped around me...
 1. MY SIN has put me in this place.
 2. I have sinned against a holy and righteous God.
 3. What is my only hope?
 4. MERCY!
 - What do you do when your sinking in quick sand and you can't get out.
 1. It's very simple.
 2. You cry out for mercy.

VII. WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS

a. And what does a person do who was suffocating from the cords of death and feeling the horror of its eternity...and when they cried out for mercy...they received it?

- i. That person worships!
 - God, you created me to have abundant life underneath your word...and I along with all mankind rebelled against that.
 1. Yet, you saved me from the judgement that I rightfully deserved!
 - You have my whole life! I want to go back to how you created me to live with you as Lord and me as your servant.
 1. You say what's true, I follow.
 2. That is where my joy is found.
 3. You have all of me.
- ii. Joyful & Authentic Obedience.



b. This is what I want us to see on our white board that has been cleared of all the clutter and baggage.

- i. Step One: We have all sinned against God and deserve death.
 - But God is merciful and if we would confess our sin and cry out to Him for mercy.
- ii. Step Two: We are met with the saving grace of the cross of Jesus Christ.
 - And when you feel the snares of death and cry out to God in desperation for mercy and you find it in Jesus...
- iii. Step Three: That unleashes a life of joyful, authentic obedience.
 - Not to earn salvation but in response to it!

VIII. NOMINAL & LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

a. Earlier, I said that when we let our whiteboard get cluttered with all these thoughts about Christianity, we can lose the core.

- i. And I believe that in our context today, we see this most often in what I am going to call 'Nominal Christianity' and 'Liberal Christianity.'
 - Nominal Christianity is being a Christian in name only.
 1. They would identify as Christians. But it doesn't really impact their life.
 2. They desire to live a life of joyful, authentic obedience.
 3. But it's not really a priority.



- Liberal Christianity is being a Christian but picking and choosing which parts of the Bible you accept/reject.
 1. They would also identify as Christians, but the only person they submit to in regard to determining truth is themselves.
- ii. **And I think that both nominal Christianity and liberal Christianity has the same cause...And that is their whiteboard does not have room for step one.**
- The nominal Christian hasn't truly felt the reality of Step One.
 1. They are not aware of the wickedness of their sin.
 2. And, therefore, they haven't desperately cried out for mercy.
 3. It's easy to be a nominal Christian in America and live your life in Christian circles but never feel the weight of sin.
 4. Therefore, their life is not marked by joyful, authentic obedience to God.
 - The liberal Christian rejects Step One. It's offensive to them.
 1. We should reject this part of our Bible.
 2. At the end of the day, the love of Jesus will win everyone over whether they confess their sin or not.
- iii. **And I believe that today when non-believers think of Christians in America, what they see is the lives of nominal and/or liberal Christians, not the lives of those who are marked by joyful, authentic obedience in response to rescue!**



b. If you're not a Christian, maybe this is a bit why it has been hard to consider believing in Jesus.

i. You've seen Christians who are self-righteous.

- They're very proud of themselves for their morality and they look down on others who are not as good as them.
- But the reality is, these people have skipped step one.
- You can't truly face Step One and not come to step two humbled.
- A recipient of grace and mercy is not proud, but they will boast in their Savior.

ii. Maybe you've seen Christians who are not teachable.

- They get offended by being confronted on anything.
 1. They can't handle having their weaknesses pointed out.
- They skipped step one.
- You can't face Step One and not come to step two like the Apostle Paul who says: "I will boast in my weakness so that the power of Christ may rest on me."

iii. Maybe you've seen Christians who treat God like a genie...just trying to manipulate him to get some sort of blessing...

- They skipped step one.
- You can't face step one and not come to step two knowing that the greatest blessing of all is our rescue in Christ.
- That rescue is enough for contentment in this life.



- iv. It's possible, if you are having a hard time believing, that the Christianity that has been modeled to you is not true Christianity.
 - And I want to exhort you today to consider that if you're not a Christian, even though you may have seen a poor example, Step One is still a reality for you.
 - And Step Two is available in Christ if you cry out for mercy.

c. But to those who do believe...Have you skipped step one in how you relate to God?

- i. Does the gospel of Jesus Christ produce in you a joyful, authentic obedience to God that says: "You have rescued me and now you have all of me."
 - "You are Lord and I am so glad to be your servant."
 - "You are good. You are holy. You are righteous. You are gracious. You are merciful. I don't question you. Your thoughts are higher than mine. And you now have all of me. Every single part of my life is yours."
 - I surrender my life to you and your Word.
- ii. Church, if we want authentic faith, let's not skip step one.

IX. PRAY

a. Pray with me:

- i. God would this be the posture of our hearts:
 - Read v. 1-2.

