



-- Read Psalm 116:1-9

-- Pray

In our world today, people like us are searching everywhere and anywhere for rest and peace and joy, aren't they? We look to fitness centers. We look to financial centers. We look to the big sales at the mall... Some look to television, some look to pills, and some look to alcohol... We look to success on the job and success in the school; we even look to the success of our favorite teams... We look to politicians and governments and the evening news... relationships, entertainment, sex, and schemes. We look everywhere for peace of mind, yet everywhere we look, all we find is yet another place where peace cannot be found.

So, then, where is there true and lasting peace? Well, in these verses that we have read from Psalm 116, we find God's answer to this crucial question, and it is this:

Big Idea: The miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace.

Please look with me at our text once again, because in it we are blessed to notice at least three reasons why the miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace, the first of which is this...

1.) In His mercy, God hears us. (v. 1-4)

-- v. 1-2 – God heard the Psalmists cry for mercy.

-- v. 1 – This is the fount of the Psalmist's expression of love for God.

-- v. 2 – This is the foundation of the Psalmist's expression of devotion to God.

-- v. 3-4

- Notice the intense immediacy and acute peril of the situation described in the text.
- We cannot be exactly sure what the trouble is. It is delightfully vague, since these descriptions can be so powerfully applied to all sorts of situations in our own lives.
- Regardless of its specific nature, the Psalmist has found himself in a situation so severe that no one other than Almighty God could help.
- This is not the picture of someone who is merely weaving his way between many potential dangers, but rather one who is already caught and held in the grip of death.

As I contemplate this text and envision its powerful imagery, I am reminded of what is perhaps the most dramatic scene in the epic film “Titanic,” starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Jack and Kate Winslet as Rose. This particular scene comes near the end of the film, at which point the “unsinkable” luxury liner has entirely disappeared into the depths of the dark sea. Its brilliant lights are shining no more. The security and opulence in which it boasted are now utterly useless as more than 1500 of its bewildered passengers have either drowned or frozen to death in its icy waters.

But not all are dead. While thousands of bodies float lifelessly in the frozen waters, one young girl, Rose remains alive...barely. She had found a floating piece of what was once an extravagant staircase, and she lies upon it, nearly unconscious, clinging to the motionless hand of Jack, who, at this point, had succumbed to hypothermia. Into this desperate scene comes a lifeboat—barely half-full with passengers—hopelessly looking for hope that there might remain any who are still alive in this horrific scene.

As the boat slowly slips past, Rose summons what minute strength she has left and cries out in a nearly inaudible voice, “Come back!” They do not hear her. Again... “Come back!”... but still, the small lifeboat forges past. Finally, she eyes the body of the Titanic’s chief officer floating in the water and notices the whistle around his neck. Rose struggles to move. Her hand, she realizes, is actually frozen to Jack's. Blowing all the warm air that remains in her body upon his dead fingers, she gently unclasps their hands, releases him, and Jack fades to black in the deep, dark waters.

Rose rolls off the floating staircase and gasps as she plunges into the icy water. She swims desperately to the whistle and, grabbing it, she bows it with all the

strength in her body. Indeed, she continues to blow the whistle until the lifeboat captain takes it from her mouth and hauls her into the boat. The cords of death had entangled her, yet she is rescued. The anguish of the grave had come upon her, yet she is saved. Trouble and sorrow had overcome her, yet she will live.

And as amazing as is the rescue that is depicted in this film, it cannot compare to the mercy of God that rescues you and me. While we may not be drowning in the North Atlantic Ocean, apart from Christ, every single one of us is drowning in the sea of sin. While the acute anguish of an earthly grave may not yet shake our senses, apart from Christ every one of us is dead already—dead in sin and transgressions against God. And though we may not yet be entangled in the cords of physical death, we are all wrapped up in rebellion against our righteous God.

Let me ask you, then: Are these truths real enough to you and me today to cause us to cry out to God for mercy? Do we understand our desperate separation from God without Christ and, therefore, cry out to Him with all the strength our feeble voices can afford, saying “Come back!” Like the Psalmist, do we call out to God in complete dependence and say, “O Lord, save me!”

Please know this truth from our Scripture today: If we will cry unto God for mercy from the depths of our inmost being, we can be assured that what was true for the Psalmist remains true for us this morning... God *will* hear us. Though our words are feeble and frail, we need no whistle, for He hears the cries of those who call out to Him for help. Though our speech is finite and our voices are fragile, our Father in heaven still mercifully turns His ear to all who come to Him in faith.

And in the fact that God hears us there is a peace that this world simply cannot afford. It is the peace of those who know that the Creator and Almighty Master of the entire universe hears our hurts... that He sees our struggles... that He knows our needs... and He cares about our concerns. This is why Paul can say in Philippians 4:6-7: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Why can we be free from anxiety? Because God promises us that He hears the prayers and petitions that we voice with thanksgiving. And in the simple fact that he hears us, Scripture promises us a *peace that passes all understanding*.

So let me ask you: Is your life filled with anxiety? Has your pursuit of peace produced mostly panic and pessimism? Let me ask you: Are you looking for a peace of your own making, or are you looking for mercy? Will you today, from the depths of your spirit, cry out to God and say, "O Lord, save me!"? Please know this today: The miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace because in His mercy, God hears us.

The second reason why the miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace is that...

2.) In His mercy, God helps us. (v. 5-6)

You see, the great love for God that the Psalmist expresses in verse 1 and the deep devotion to God that he professes in verse 2 are based upon more than the simple fact that God heard the sound of his voice when he was in peril. I mean, lots of things hear us when we speak. Take for example my cats...

- They can hear the faintest sound of a mouse scampering around, yet...
- "Here Kitty, Kitty, Kitty" ... Nothing!
- "Don't you dare lick my sandwich!" ... (Tongue lapping noises)

We rejoice in the Lord not merely because He merely *hears* random sounds that emanate from our mouths. No, we delight in Him because He loves us and He listens... because He comprehends and He cares... because He answers our cries for mercy with merciful actions! The miracle of mercy, you see, is about more than God's listening ear... it is also about God's mighty right arm.

Thus, in verse 5, we hear the Psalmist singing about a God who is gracious and righteous, for not only did God hear him, but God healed him as well. And he shouts of God's compassion, because not only did God see him in desperation, but God saved him from death. Though he was unworthy, God came to his aid. Thus in verse 6, this grateful Psalmist cries out in praise, declaring to all, "*The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me!*"

Please understand this fact from Scripture this morning: True comfort will never come from attempting to avoid the unavoidable adversity of this life. Real and lasting comfort, rather, comes in the middle of life's trials to those who meditate upon the marvelous mercy of God. Perpetual peace is produced only by our gracious, righteous, and compassionate God who not only hears us, but helps us as well. The miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace because, in His mercy, God helps us.

Finally, the third reason why the miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace is this...

3.) In His mercy, God harbors us. (v. 7-9)

When we consider verses 7-9 we see the sublime glory of God in the fact that this man one who was once lost and in anguish is now safely at rest in the heavenly harbor of God's goodness. There, the Psalmist writes,

Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

-- v. 7a – “*Be at rest once more...*”

-- Clearly, the Psalmist had previously known and experienced the rest of God's goodness, but that rest had been severely disrupted.

-- The same can easily happen to us when trouble, sorrow, or conflict comes.

-- v. 7b – *...for the Lord has been good to you.*” – Explained in v. 8-9

Also in verse 7, we are blessed to take special notice of the rather unique noun of direct address that is mentioned there: “O my soul.” What we have here, then, is an instance of the Psalmist essentially talking to himself. However, he is not talking to himself aimlessly or without purpose. Rather, we hear him talking directly to his very soul. “*Be at rest once more, o my soul,*” he cries.

In essence, we see him grabbing hold of his heart with both hands and commanding it to listen. We watch him instructing his inmost being with all the keen intensity of a parent attempting to communicate a critical truth to his child. The Psalmist bursts forth with passion and *urges* his soul to be at rest in God. He impels his spirit to remember that, in His mercy, God has heard his cry for help. He incites his heart to recall that, in His mercy, God has already helped him out of his affliction and saved him from death. He implores his soul to know that, in His mercy, God has forever harbored his life in His limitless love. “O my soul,” he cries, “remember the rest that results from redemption you have already received.” And here we see so powerfully that the miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace because, in His mercy, God harbors us in His goodness.

With all that in mind, it is very helpful to consider the biblical and historical contexts of this Psalm. Psalms 113-118 are a group of Psalms that have long been known as the “Egyptian Hallel” or the “Egyptian Praise.” Because they so

powerfully speak to the sublime salvation that began in Israel's Exodus from Egypt and would be spread to all nations, these Psalms have been sung during the annual celebration of the Passover since early times. As custom has it, the first two Psalms, Psalms 113 and 114, are sung before the Passover meal, and the remaining four, Psalms 115-118, are sung after it. Therefore, our Psalm for this morning, Psalm 116, was quite likely sung by Jesus and His disciples immediately after they had shared together what Jesus knew would be His last supper.

Hear the words of the Gospel of Mark in chapter 14, verses 22-26, where Mark records the events of that night.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Notice again verse 26. Mark writes, "*When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" Was our Psalm for tonight among the words sung on that occasion? We cannot know, but it may very well have been. Regardless, we can be certain that the mercy and peace proclaimed in our Psalm not only pointed back to Israel's exodus from Egypt, but they more profoundly pointed ahead to the matchless mercy that would be revealed in Christ.

Thus, as Jesus breaks the bread and declares, "*Take it; this is my body,*" we can respond with the precious poetry of verses 1-2, announcing, "*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!*" As our Lord pours the wine and says, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,*" we can rejoice in the truth of verses 5-6, proclaiming "*The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.*" And as the stone is rolled away... as Christ's broken body and spilled blood resplendently resound in His resurrection from the dead... as the grave is overwhelmed and the miracle of mercy is made complete, we can, each

and every one, address our inmost being and repeat together the wonderful words of verse 7:

“Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you!” “Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you!” “Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you!”

We can join together and live out forever the descriptions of verses 8-9. By God’s grace, those who truly claim the miracle of mercy that is revealed in Christ and sublimely shout to the heavens, *“You, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling!* Because Christ in His mercy has paid the price for our perdition, you and I can rejoice together that *“[We] may walk before the LORD in the land of the living!”* And, because of the resurrection of Christ, this promise is not just today, but for eternity in God’s kingdom. You see, just as surely as the miracle of mercy is the pinnacle of peace, so too the pinnacle of mercy is the cross of Christ.

Do you know this unparalleled peace this morning? If not, let me ask you, have you fully considered cross of Christ? Is the magnificent motion of His matchless mercy moving in your heart, or is it being pushed aside by selfish ambition or the pressures of life?

Please let me ask you this morning: Are you worn out or weary? Are you constantly worried? Are you hurting, haunted, hassled, or hurried? Be at rest, my dear friend, in the mercy of Christ, for the Lord has been good to you... Are you anxious this morning? Do you find yourself ailing? Are you frenzied, fearful, falling, or failing? Be at rest, my dear friend, in the mercy of Christ, for the Lord has been good to you... Are you skittish today? Are you scared or stressed? Are you damaged, dismayed, discouraged, or depressed? Be at rest, my dear friend, in the mercy of Christ, for the Lord has been good to you.

Please hear this. In this world marred by sin, there will be struggles and strife. There will be backache and heartache and grief. But as we have seen in our Psalm, at the very same time, wherever we are, there is a perfect peace that surpasses it all. Jesus promises us both in one remarkable verse. In John 16:33, our Lord says, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

I want to close this morning by quoting to you the lyrics to a beautiful and heartfelt song penned by Steven Curtis Chapman, which inspires the title to our message this morning—"Miracle of Mercy." Please hear these lyrics today, because in them, we hear the humble heart of a humble man who comes before God for mercy. In them, we observe the contrite confession of a man who comprehends the vast chasm that separates God's holiness from our unrighteousness. Yet, in them, we also hear the unparalleled peace and incomparable calm that belong to all who abide in the matchless mercy of our great God.

If the truth was known and a light was shown
On every hidden part of my soul,
Most would turn away, shake their head and say,
"He still has such a long way to go."
If the truth was know you'd see that the only good in me
Is Jesus, oh it's Jesus.

If the walls could speak of the times I've been weak
When everybody thought I was strong,
Could I show my face if it weren't for the grace
Of the one who's known the truth all along?
If the walls could speak they'd say that my only hope is the grace
Of Jesus, the grace of Jesus.
But, oh the goodness and the grace in Him!
He takes it all and makes it mine and causes his light in me to shine.
And he loves me with a love that never ends,
Just as I am not as I do.
Could this be real; could this be true?
This could only be a miracle.
This could only be the miracle of mercy.

Where will look for peace? Please do not turn to shoddy substitutes, for they will all eventually disappoint. Rather, let us ever and always turn to the miracle of mercy, for in it we will find the very pinnacle of peace.