

# Exposition on Psalm 116

by St. Augustine

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*St. Augustine's exposition on Psalm 116 emphasizes the relationship between love, prayer, and God's grace in our lives amid suffering and community worship.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 114:1-115, Matthew 5:4, Luke 15:6, 1 Corinthians 13:13

**Topics:** "Faith And Hope", "Gods Mercy"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches on the theme of faith, hope, and charity, emphasizing the interconnectedness of believing, hoping, and loving in relation to God's response to our prayers. He reflects on the human soul's journey back to God, acknowledging past sins and the need for belief, hope, and love. Augustine explores the concept of God's graciousness, righteousness, and mercy, highlighting the transformative power of God's actions in delivering souls from death and tears. He delves into the struggles faced by believers, the importance of speaking the truth despite opposition, and the need to trust in God's grace amidst trials and tribulations.

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## Transcript

1. I have loved, since the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer Psalm 114:1. Let the soul that is sojourning in absence from the Lord sing thus, let that sheep which had strayed sing thus, let that son who had died and returned to life, who had been lost and was found; Luke 15:6, 24 let our soul sing thus, brethren, and most beloved sons. Let us be taught, and let us abide, and let us sing thus with the Saints: I have loved: since the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer. Is this a reason for having loved, that the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer? And do we not rather love, because He has heard, or that He may hear? What then means, I have loved, since the Lord will hear? Does he, because hope is wont to inflame love, say that he has loved, since he has hoped that God will listen to the voice of his prayer?

2. But whence has he hoped for this? Since, he says, He has inclined His ear unto me: and in my days I have called upon Him Psalm 114:2. I loved, therefore, because He will hear; He will hear, because He has inclined His ear unto me. But whence do you know, O human soul, that God has inclined His ear unto you, except you say, I have believed? These three things, therefore, abide, faith, hope, charity: 1 Corinthians 13:13 because you have believed, you have hoped; because you have hoped, you have loved....

3. And what are your days, since you have said, In my days I have called upon Him? Are they those perchance, in which the fullness of time came, and God sent His Son, Galatians 4:4 who had already said, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you? Isaiah 49:8 ...I may

rather call my days the days of my misery, the days of my mortality, the days according to Adam, full of toil and sweat, the days according to the ancient corruption. For I lying, stuck fast in the deep mire, in another Psalm also have cried out, Behold, You have made my days old; in these days of mine have I called upon You. For my days are different from the days of my Lord. I call those my days, which by my own daring I have made for myself, whereby I have forsaken Him: and, since He reigns everywhere, and is all-powerful, and holds all things, I have deserved prison; that is, I have received the darkness of ignorance, and the bonds of mortality....For in these days of mine, The snares of death compassed me round about, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me Psalm 114:3: pains that would not have overtaken me, had I not wandered from You. But now they have overtaken me; but I found them not, while I was rejoicing in the prosperity of the world, in which the snares of hell deceive the more.

4. But after I too found trouble and heaviness, I called upon the Name of the Lord Psalm 114:4. For trouble and profitable sorrow I did not feel; trouble, wherein He gives aid, unto whom it is said, O be Thou our help in trouble: and vain is the help of man. For I thought I might rejoice and exult in the vain help of man; but when I had heard from my Lord, Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted: Matthew 5:4 I did not wait until I should lose those temporal blessings in which I rejoiced, and should then mourn: but I gave heed to that very misery of mine which caused me to rejoice in such things, which I both feared to lose, and yet could not retain; I gave heed to it firmly and courageously, and I saw that I was not only agonized by the adversities of this world, but even bound by its good fortune; and thus I found the trouble and heaviness which had escaped me, and called upon the Name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech You, deliver my soul. Let then the holy people of God say, I called upon the Name of the Lord: and let the remainder of the heathen hear, who do not as yet call upon the Name of the Lord; let them hear and seek, that they may discover trouble and heaviness, and may call upon the Name of the Lord, and be saved....

5. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful Psalm 114:5. He is gracious, righteous, and merciful. Gracious in the first place, because He has inclined His ear unto me; and I knew not that the ear of God had approached my lips, till I was aroused by those beautiful feet, that I might call upon the Lord's Name: for who has called upon Him, save he whom He first called? Hence therefore He is in the first place gracious; but righteous, because He scourges; and again, merciful, because He receives; for He scourges every son whom He receives; nor ought it to be so bitter to me that He scourges, as sweet that He receives. For how should not The Lord, who keeps little ones Psalm 114:6, scourge those whom, when of mature age, He seeks to be heirs; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? Hebrews 12:6-7 I was in misery, and He helped me. He helped me, because I was in misery; for the pain which the physician causes by his knife is not penal, but salutary.

6. Turn again then unto your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has done good to you Psalm 114:7: not for your deservings, or through your strength; but because the Lord has done good to you. Since, he says, He has delivered my soul from death Psalm 114:8. It is wonderful, most beloved brethren, that, after he had said that his soul should turn unto rest, since the Lord had rewarded him; he added, since He has delivered my soul from death. Did it turn unto rest, because it was delivered from death? Is not rest more usually said of death? What is the action of him whose life is rest, and death disquietude? Such then ought to be the action of the soul, as may tend to a quiet security, not one that may increase restless toil; since He has delivered it from death, who, pitying it, said, Come unto Me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, etc. Matthew 11:28-30 Meek therefore and humble, following, so to speak, Christ as its path, should the action of the soul be that tends towards repose; nevertheless, not slothful and supine; that it may finish its course, as it is written, In quietness make perfect your works. Sirach 3:19 You have

delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Whoever feels the chain of this flesh, chants these things as fulfilled in hope towards himself. For it is truly said, I was in misery, and He delivered me; but the Apostle says this also truly, that we are saved by hope. Romans 8:24 And that we are delivered from death, is well said to be already fulfilled, so that we may understand the death of unbelievers, of whom he says, Leave the dead to bury their dead. Matthew 8:22 ...He will then clear our eyes of tears, when He shall save our feet from falling. For there will then be no slipping of our feet as they walk, when there will be no sliding of the weak flesh. But now, however firm our path, which is Christ, be; yet since we place flesh, which we are enjoined to subdue, beneath us; in the very work of chastening and subduing it, it is a great thing not to fall: but not to slip in the flesh, who can attain? I shall please in the sight of the Lord, in the land of the living Psalm 114:9....We labour indeed now, because we are awaiting the redemption of our body: Romans 8:23 but, when death shall have been swallowed up in victory, and this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 then there will be no weeping, because there will be no falling; and no falling, because no corruption. And therefore we shall then no longer labour to please, but we shall be entirely pleasing in the sight of the Lord, in the land of the living.

7. ...I believed, says he, and therefore did I speak. But I was sorely brought down Psalm 115:10. For he suffered many tribulations, for the sake of the word which he faithfully held, faithfully preached; and he was sorely brought down; as they feared who loved the praise of men better than that of God. But what means, But I? He should rather say, I believed, and therefore I have spoken, and I was sorely brought down: why did he add, But I, save because a man may be sorely brought down by those who oppose the truth, the truth itself cannot, which he believes and speaks? Whence also the Apostle, when he was speaking of his chain, says, the word of God is not bound. 2 Timothy 2:9 So this man also, since there is one person of the holy witnesses, that is, of the Martyrs of God, says, I believed, and therefore will I speak. But I; not that which I believed, not the word which I have delivered; but I was sorely brought down.

8. I said in my trance, All men are liars Psalm 115:11. By trance he means fear, which when persecutors threaten, and when the sufferings of torture or death impend, human weakness suffers. For this we understand, because in this Psalm the voice of Martyrs is heard. For trance is used in another sense also, when the mind is not beside itself by fear, but is possessed by some inspiration of revelation. But I said in my haste, All men are liars. In consternation he has had regard to his infirmity, and has seen that he ought not to presume on himself; for as far as pertains to the man himself, he is a liar, but by the grace of God he is made true; lest yielding to the pressure of his enemies he might not speak what he had believed, but might deny it; even as it happened to Peter, since he had trusted in himself, and was to be taught that we ought not to trust in man. And if every one ought not to trust in man, surely not in himself; because he is a man. Rightly therefore in his fear did he perceive that every man was a liar; since they also whom no fear robs of their presence of mind, so that they never lie by yielding to the persecutors, are such by the gifts of God, not by their own strength....

9. What, he asks, what reward shall I give unto the Lord, for all the benefits that He has returned unto me? Psalm 115:12. He says not, for all the benefits that He has done unto me but for all the benefits that He has returned unto me. What deeds then on the man's part had preceded, that all the benefits of God were not said to be given, but returned? What had preceded, on the man's part, save sins? God therefore repays good for evil, while unto Him men repay evil for good; for such was the return of those who said, This is the heir: come, let us kill him. Matthew 21:38

10. But this man seeks what he may return unto the Lord, and finds not, save out of those things which the Lord Himself returns. I will receive, he says, the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord Psalm 115:13. My vows will I render to the Lord, before all His people Psalm 115:14. Who has given you the cup of salvation, which when you take, and callest upon the Name of the Lord, you shall return unto Him a reward for all that He has returned unto you? Who, save He who says, Are ye able to drink the cup that I shall drink of? Who has given unto you to imitate His sufferings, save He who has suffered before for you? And therefore, Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints Psalm 115:15. He purchased it by His Blood, which He first shed for the salvation of slaves, that they might not hesitate to shed their blood for the Lord's Name; which, nevertheless, would be profitable for their own interests, not for those of the Lord.

11. Let therefore the slave purchased at so great a price confess his condition, and say, Behold, O Lord, how that I am Your servant: I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid Psalm 115:16....This, therefore, is the son of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is above, the free mother of us all. Galatians 4:26 And free indeed from sin she is, but the handmaid of righteousness; to whose sons still pilgrims it is said, You have been called unto liberty; Galatians 5:13 and again he makes them servants, when he says, but by love serve one another....Let therefore that servant say unto God, Many call themselves martyrs, many Your servants, because they hold Your Name in various heresies and errors; but since they are beside Your Church, they are not the children of Your handmaid. But I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid. You have broken my bonds asunder.

12. I will offer to You the sacrifice of praise Psalm 115:17. For I have not found any deserts of mine, since You have broken my bonds asunder; I therefore owe You the sacrifice of praise; because, although I will boast that I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid, I will glory not in myself, but in You, my Lord, who hast broken asunder my bonds, that when I return from my desertion, I may again be bound unto You.

13. I will pay my vows unto the Lord Psalm 115:18. What vows will you pay? What victims have you vowed? What burnt-offerings, what holocausts? Do you refer to what you have said a little before, I will receive the cup of salvation, and will call upon the Name of the Lord; and, I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving? And indeed whosoever well considers what he is vowing to the Lord, and what vows he is paying, let him vow himself, let him pay himself as a vow: this is exacted, this is due. On looking at the coin, the Lord says, Render unto CÃsar the things which are CÃsar's, and unto God the things which are God's: Matthew 22:21 his own image is rendered unto CÃsar: let His image be rendered unto God.

14. In the courts, he says, of the Lord's house Psalm 115:19. What is the Lord's house, the same is the Lord's handmaid: and what is God's house, save all His people? It therefore follows, In the sight of all His people. And now he more openly names his mother herself. For what else is His people, but what follows, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem? For than that which is returned grateful, if it be returned from peace, and in peace. But they who are not sons of this handmaid, have loved war rather than peace....

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