

Psalm 116: Giving Thanks & Being Resolved

January 20, 1788 saw all eleven ships of the First Fleet safely anchored in Botany Bay in Sydney. They'd been at sea for eight months after sailing down the English Channel. On board were 750 convicts with enough guards and sailors to ensure their safe arrival in the new penal colony. On January 26 they moved to Sydney Cove.

The Chaplain was an Anglican Minister, Richard Johnson, aged 35. Historians record that he was a Bible believing Minister, keen to see men and women in his care, come to faith in Jesus Christ and submit their lives to God's rule. He was to remain at Sydney Cove in those primitive and difficult days for 12 years.

After 8 months at sea aboard the store ship "Golden Grove", Johnson gathered all who were willing under a great tree on February 3rd to offer up thanks to the Lord for His great mercies. The text of his sermon was Psalm 116:12-14. Sadly the sermon is lost but we still have the text!

What an appropriate passage of Scripture on which to preach after all that they'd been through. The whole Psalm oozes thankfulness to God in response to answered prayer:

- An expression of **thanks**, as the Psalmist remembers the past.
- An expression of **resolve**, to trust God exclusively and worship only Him, for the rest of his days.

1. THANKS:

History records a careful plan by many to have this particular Minister appointed as Chaplain, because of his zeal, faith and his love for the Lord.

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His supporters prayed and of course Richard Johnson prayed, along with many relatives and friends of the human cargo. For 8 long hazardous months they prayed. They didn't stop praying as soon as the Fleet was out of sight!

Verses 4 & 5 of the Psalm indicate that the Psalmist kept on praying throughout his drama and his prayer was answered.

The crowd gathered under the tree in Sydney Cove on February 3, 1788 had cause to be thankful! They were alive! They'd been kept safe through the great sea journey, although most of them didn't want to be there! They were convicts! But they were alive.

You and I have much for which to be thankful to the Lord:

- Freedom to worship and outwardly follow Jesus, 229 years later!
- Freedom to spread the Good News of Jesus, a privilege denied to Christians in many other countries.
- The Bible in our own language to read, study and be taught from week by week.
- Bishop David and other Church leaders in our Diocese.
- Our magnificent land and climate.
- For many, the privilege of work.
- Good health services, education and housing.
- Peace and security in a time when terrorism strikes in other lands.
- Answered prayer, like the Psalmist and the First Fleeters.

How we need to declare and show our thanks to God.

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2. RESOLVE:

In Psalm 116, the Psalmist not only recognises his need to thank God for all of his mercies. He also wants to show in practical terms, that he really is thankful.

From verse 8 and following, we see that the Psalmist sees a reason for his deliverance from death: to live for God in all of life's situations and to make God known, to publicly stand up for Him and be counted: *that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*

In his 2nd and 3rd Letters, the Apostle John uses the same expression: *walking in the truth*. He writes *I have no greater joy than to hear that my 'children' are walking in the truth.*

In verse 12 we find a challenging question posed by the Psalmist: *How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?*

Many Christians have pondered the same question. Maybe you are one of them.

What answer does the Psalmist give?

Verse 13: He will live out the gift of Salvation he's been given, expressed in:

- Prayer.
- Fulfilling vows that he's made to God.
- Giving a thank offering to God. Generosity will be a mark of his life.

Richard Johnson had a burning desire to convince men and women to become Christians; to repent and turn to the Lord and then live

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their lives in obedience to God's Word, serving Him however they could.

Johnson was frustrated by many in power, including Capt. Arthur Philip and his successor who had very little time for God. Those in power only used Christianity as a cloak, to bully the thieves, prostitutes, gamblers and drunkards into a more moral way of life.

What of our resolve for our lives in 2017?

How can we *repay the Lord for all His goodness to us*? In what practical ways can we show our thanks to the Lord for the Salvation He's given us in Jesus Christ?

- We can take our Christian 'calling' more seriously, standing up and being counted as Jesus' men and women living in a community which largely ignores the Lord; with a unity crossing denominational divisions.
- We can make God's way of Salvation known to others in our community as well as supporting those who make the Gospel known in remote Australia and overseas.
- We can demonstrate to our community that being a Christian affects our whole life.
- We can seek to please the Lord, wherever possible, with our time, talents, assets and income.

Psalm 51:17 tells us that God wants us wholly committed and willing to serve Him.

Romans 12:1-2 tells us about true worship and acceptable sacrifice being a life committed to Jesus Christ as Lord.

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May God help us all to be truly thankful to Him and live that thankfulness out every day during 2017.

May God help us to stir one another on to sacrificial love and good works.

May God help us to make Jesus known to our nation, beginning in our homes, amongst our families and within our community.