

# AGM - Boring or Blessing?

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[ 0 : 00 ] But if we could, for a few moments this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Psalms and Psalm 116.

Psalm 116. And if we read again in verse 12.

Psalm 116 and verse 12, where it says, What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? You know, whenever we hear the words annual general meeting, or its acronym AGM, we immediately think, well, I don't know about you, but often is the case, we immediately think of the word boring.

We think of the word boring because if we're honest, who wants to hear about facts and figures? Who wants to know about income and expenditure? Who wants to discuss property and money?

[ 1 : 14 ] And yet, an AGM is needed and it's necessary, not only because it's a legal requirement as a charity. We are a charity. So we have to provide a financial statement each year.

But it's also important because the church has to be open. The church has to be honest. The church has to be upfront about the freewill offerings of its people.

Because without your freewill offerings, this church wouldn't exist. The maintenance, the ministry, and the mission of this church, it couldn't go forward.

The work, the witness, and the worship of our congregation, it couldn't be possible without your freewill offerings. Which is why I believe that we shouldn't view the AGM as boring, but as a blessing.

We should see tonight as something that is not boring. It is a blessing. And that we should see the financial report of the treasurer. We should see that as a blessing that we have the freewill offerings of the congregation presented to us.

[ 2 : 20 ] It's an occasion and an opportunity for thanksgiving to the Lord. Which is why we turn our attention to the words of Psalm 116 this evening.

Because Psalm 116 is one of the Hallel hymns. And it's a hymn of thanksgiving. In fact, the words of our text, verse 12, they are the words that you often see printed on your freewill offering envelopes that are distributed each year.

What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits or all His gifts to me? And so this evening I want us to ask the question, AGM, boring or blessing?

AGM, boring or blessing? And I'd like us just to consider our answer by using two headings.

Offering, not obligation, and opportunity, not obstacle.

Offering, not obligation, and opportunity, not obstacle. So first of all, offering, not obligation. Is the AGM, is it boring or a blessing?

[ 3 : 34 ] And we're being reminded that it's an offering, not an obligation. What shall I render to the Lord, he says, for all His benefits to me? As we said, Psalm 116 is one of the Hallel hymns.

Because Psalms 113 to Psalms 118, they are known as the Hallel hymns from the word Hallelujah, which, as you know, means praise the Lord.

And their purpose as Hallel hymns is to praise the Lord for His work of salvation. In fact, the Hallel hymns, they were sung during the Passover by the Jews as they remembered and recounted the rescue and redemption of the children of Israel from slavery and bondage in Egypt.

And so you can see why these Hallel hymns are known as hymns of thanksgiving, because they seek to promote and praise the Lord for His great act of salvation.

But this Hallel hymn, Psalm 116, it's different to the other Hallel hymns, because it's very personal. It's the personal testimony of the Lord's people.

[ 4 : 45 ] It's the confession of the Christian. That's why it's a favorite of many of the Lord's people. It's Tosche's favorite psalm. Because it opens with this personal proclamation of praise.

I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here. For I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

And my Christian friend, is that not your testimony tonight? I love the Lord because he listened to my voice. You love the Lord tonight because the Lord, the God of heaven, has listened to your voice.

I love the Lord because he listened to my voice. But as we consider the words of our text in verse 12, what the hymn writer makes clear to us is his response to the redemption of the Lord.

Because he asks in verse 12, What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?

[ 5 : 51 ] The hymn writer, he is willing and wanting to respond to the Lord's redemption and rescue of his soul by rendering to the Lord not only His praise, but also His possessions.

And that's what he confesses as a Christian. He says, I love the Lord because He first loved me. I want to give to the Lord because the Lord has given to me His only begotten Son.

I want to make sacrifices for the Lord because the Lord has sacrificed His Son for me. I want to bless the Lord and bestow gifts upon Him because He has blessed me and bestowed benefits and blessings upon me.

And you know, that's actually what we were singing about in Psalm 103. David, the psalmist, as we read and as we sang, He blessed the Lord for all His benefits.

You remember how the psalm begins, O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up His holy name to magnify and bless.

[ 7 : 00 ] Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God, and not forgetful be of all His gracious benefits. He hath bestowed on me. And David, in Psalm 103, he goes on to explain all these benefits and all these blessings which the Lord bestows upon His people.

He says, My friend, the hymn writer's response My friend, the hymn writer's response to the Lord's redemption and rescue of his soul is that he not only wanted to render to the Lord His praise, He also wanted to render to the Lord His possessions.

He wanted to bless the Lord, just like David in Psalm 103. He wanted to bless the Lord and bestow gifts upon the Lord because he had been blessed and bestowed with gracious benefits from the Lord.

And what we see is that for the hymn writer in Psalm 116, his gift to the Lord was an offering, not an obligation.

It was an offering, not an obligation. It was a delight, not a duty. It was of His free will, not His forced will. It was given by contribution, not by command or compulsion or coercion.

[ 8 : 45 ] It was a free will offering. It was a free will offering. And you know, the concept of a free will offering, it's a very biblical one. And we see it so clearly even when the first church building was built, which was, of course, the tabernacle.

Because when the Lord gave Moses the instructions on how to build the tabernacle as a place of worship, the Lord didn't just miraculously provide all the materials that they needed to build this structure.

No, the Lord, who had redeemed His people and rescued His people from slavery and bondage in Egypt, He requested them that they would respond by rendering to Him not only their praise, but also their possessions for the work, witness, and worship of the Lord.

We read in Exodus 25 that the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution. From everyone whose heart moves them, you shall receive the contribution for me.

You know, unlike all the kingdoms and empires of the ancient world who demanded a tax to be paid to them, the Lord only requested from His people, He requested from His people that they would respond to Him by rendering to Him not only their praise, but also their possessions.

[ 10 : 18 ] It was to be a voluntary gift according to their wealth. It was to be a free will offering to the Lord. And that's what the Lord said. He said, From everyone whose heart moves them, you shall receive the contribution for me.

Their offering to the Lord, it wasn't from their hand. It was from their heart. It wasn't from their hand, but from their heart. Their left hand was not, their left hand wasn't to know what their right hand was doing, because it was an act.

It wasn't an act of the hand. It was an act of the heart. In fact, it was an act of the will. It was a free will offering to the Lord. It was an act of the will and even an act of worship.

It was an act of the will. It was an act of worship. Because as you know, worship begins not when we sing our first item of praise.

Worship begins when we respond to the Lord's redemption and rescue by rendering our free will offering to the Lord. And you know, I have to say, and I'm sure the treasurer will agree, that as a congregation, your gifts of generosity, both in monetary and material gifts towards the maintenance, mission, and ministry of this congregation, it's so encouraging.

[ 11 : 44 ] And it should be encouraging to you as well. But you know, this model of giving to the work, witness, and worship of the Lord, it's a model that was first instituted and implemented not only for ministry at the tabernacle, but it was also instituted and implemented for the minister at the tabernacle.

Not only the ministry of the tabernacle, but also the minister at the tabernacle. Because you read in Exodus that when the priests and their families who were from the tribe of Levi, when they eventually, when they were to enter the promised land, the priests weren't to receive an apportionment of the promised land like all the other tribes.

Instead, the tribe of Levi, they were to be cared for. So all the priests were to be cared for by the contributions of the Lord's people. And it's that model that Paul implemented and instructed the New Testament churches to adopt and apply in their congregations.

And it's the model we still use today. Because as we read in 2 Corinthians 9, Paul taught about giving to the work, witness, and worship of the gospel.

And he said that as your heart moves you, you will give your freewill offering as an act of worship to the Lord. And you'll give your contribution, he says, not by command, not by compulsion, and not by coercion.

[ 13 : 16 ] No, Paul says, each one must give as he or she has decided in their heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And so we're asking the question this evening, AGM, boring or blessing? Is it boring or is it a blessing?

And of course the answer is, it's a blessing. It's a blessing. And it's a blessing because it's about our offering. Our offering to the Lord, not our obligation.

It's about our offering, not obligation. But secondly, it's about opportunity, not obstacle. Opportunity, not obstacle.

So offering, not obligation. Opportunity, not obstacle. Opportunity, not obstacle. The hymn writer says in Psalm 116, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

[ 14 : 22 ] Now we said earlier that the hymn writer of this Hallel hymn, he is willing and he is wanting to respond to the Lord's redemption and rescue of his soul by rendering to the Lord, not only his praise, but also his possessions.

But this hymn writer, he knew that his freewill offering to the Lord was not only a contribution of thanksgiving, it was also a call to thanksgiving.

His freewill offering to the Lord was not only a contribution of thanksgiving, it was also a call to thanksgiving. And I say that because the work, the witness, and the worship of the Lord it's not just about our money.

Because the Lord doesn't just require our praise and our possessions. He requires our presence in his house. He requires our prayers for the work of the gospel.

The Lord doesn't just require our cash contribution. He requires our commitment to the cause of Christ. The Lord doesn't just require our duty in serving him.

[ 15 : 37 ] He requires our delight, our dedication, and our devotion in serving him. The Lord doesn't just require our tithe. He requires our time.

And you know that our tithe of time to the Lord is so important. Our tithe of time to the Lord is so important.

Because you know, in the day and age that we live in, the one thing that we seem to have so little of, or waste so much of, is our time. And for that reason, the Lord doesn't just require our tithe.

The Lord requires our time. And you know, I believe that that's why Paul, he called the church in Rome to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, a living offering to the Lord.

In Romans chapter 12, Paul begins that chapter by saying, I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[ 16 : 55 ] So my friend, the Lord doesn't just require our praise and our possessions. He requires our presence. He requires our prayers. He requires our whole portion.

We are to present our whole body to him as a living sacrifice, a living offering to the Lord. Do you know, we're to live our life echoing Isaiah.

Here am I. Send me. We're to present our whole body as a living offering to the Lord. Now, some people often emphasize and exhort and encourage that we should give a tenth of our wage to the Lord.

And the concept of contributing a tenth to the Lord, it's based upon Abraham's contribution.

Because when Abraham met Melchizedek, who was the king of righteousness, he gave a tenth of his possessions to Melchizedek.

But the thing is, Abraham had a tenth to give. Not everyone has a tenth to give. And you know, we actually see that in Mark's gospel, in two accounts.

[ 18 : 12 ] The first account is when Jesus sat watching people put their money into the offering box at the temple. And he saw many rich people put in large sums of money.

And then he saw a poor widow come by and put in just two small copper coins. And Jesus says about what he had just seen, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.

For the rich all contributed out of their abundance. But she contributed out of her poverty. And she has given everything she had.

She has given everything she had. There was also another woman, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with that alabaster box of perfume.

And of course, the disciples, you remember, the disciples grumbled at what she did because they said, well, you could have sold that perfume for 300 denarii and given it all to the poor.

[ 19 : 18 ] But Jesus said about her, you remember, Jesus said, leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing. She has done what she could. And you know, I love that statement.

She has done what she could. And so I don't believe that we can ever dictate or ever demand the offerings of people.

That's why it's a free will offering. It's a free will offering of worship to the Lord. That's why Paul said, each one must give as he or she has decided in their heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And you know, we always have to be very careful when we're talking about money and free will offerings. Because there's one thing we don't want to be accused of.

And that's being like the Roman Catholic Church. Who, especially in the 16th century, they imposed and they insisted upon paying for indulgences to free family members from the powers of purgatory.

[ 20 : 33 ] And there was one particular man in the 16th century called Johann Tetzel. Maybe you've heard of him. Johann Tetzel was a man who emotionally blackmailed people into buying indulgences.

Now, we're not selling indulgences. But Tetzel, he would travel from town to town preaching about family members who have died and are burning in hell. And he would say to them, you can redeem your family for just a small fee.

And Tetzel, he had all these little rhymes that he used to say to people to attract the attention of his audience. One rhyme was, place your penny on the drum, the pearly gates open, and in strolls mum.

Or another rhyme he had was, when the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs. And sadly, many people bought into it.

And they're still buying into it. Of course, one man who didn't fall for Tetzel's publicity stunt was the German reformer Martin Luther. But as we said, we should see the AGM as an opportunity, not as an obstacle, not something we just have to get through.

[ 21 : 49 ] It's an opportunity. And you know, over the past year or so, there have been many obstacles. Many obstacles. We've had difficulties with distributing free will offering envelopes due to problems with GDPR regulations.

But the Deacons Court is in the process of rectifying this. So if anybody doesn't have their free will offering envelopes, let us know. There's also the obstacles that we've had with collecting free will offering envelopes.

But we've sought to overcome these things by introducing standing orders and bank transfers and a donor box facility on our new church website. But of course, one of the most obvious obstacles that we have as a congregation, which we're still dealing with, is our church chairs.

Everybody's wondering, when are these chairs going to arrive? When are they going to come? You know, we've managed to complete a church refurbishment over the past few months, which makes the church warm and hopefully welcoming.

And it's comfortable and it gives us the opportunity to invite people to come to church who have never been to church before to come for the first time. And although we had hoped to have the church chairs here by September, and there was delays due to material shortages and lorries and all loads of other problems, but thankfully, through the help of a good friend, I can confirm that the church chairs are expected to arrive before Christmas.

[ 23 : 17 ] Now, we have to keep praying about this, but for the next few weeks, well, I'm going to be singing anyway, all I want for Christmas is my new church chairs. It's all I want. All I want for Christmas is my new church chairs.

But you know, my friend, there are many obstacles. But as you know, with the gospel, there comes lots of opportunities. There are opportunities.

And as those who love the gospel and want to live according to the gospel, we live by the promise that Jesus is building his church.

He's building this congregation. He's building this community by the gospel. He is building his church. And the wonder is, the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

That's our hope. That's our confidence. As the psalmist says, except the Lord do build the house, the builders lose their pain. Except the Lord, the city keep, the watchmen watch in vain.

[ 24 : 21 ] And so AGM, boring or blessing? It's a blessing because it's about our offering, not our obligation.

And it's a blessing because it's about the opportunities, our gospel opportunities, not our obstacles. It's about the opportunities.

And so we come just like the hymn writer this evening, saying, what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? And as we're going to sing in a moment from Psalm 92, the psalmist directs us to render thanks unto the Lord.

It is a comely thing. And to thy name, O thou most high, do praise aloud to sing. So AGM, boring or blessing?

I hope it's a blessing to be here and to gather together and to see the opportunities and the offering that we can make to the Lord and his cause.

[ 25 : 30 ] But may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Heavenly Father, we give thanks to Thee for Thy goodness to us.

We thank Thee, Lord, for providing for us and for our every need, not only providing for us spiritually, but also temporary. And Lord, we thank Thee for all that we have.

We thank Thee for, even in the past few months, being able to renovate and do works to the inside of the church. And we pray that Thou wouldst use our building for the furtherance of Thy kingdom and the glory of Thy name, that people would come in here, that they would hear Thy word, that their soul would live, that that is our longing, that those in our homes and in our families, those in our community, those who are our neighbors, our friends, those whom we have grown up with, who seem so distant and detached from the gospel.

Our longing is that they too would taste and see that Thou art good and trust in Thee and be blessed. O Lord, be near to us, we pray. Bless us, we ask.

Help us to render thanks unto the Lord, because it is a comely thing. and to Thy name, O Thou Most High, do praise aloud to sing.

[ 26 : 51 ] Lord, go before us and we pray. Bless us for the rest of our meeting, that Thou wouldst have all the glory, that Christ would have the preeminence, and that we as Thy people would know blessing.

Keep us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again this time in Psalm 92. Psalm 92 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 92, we're singing from the beginning and we're singing down to the verse marked 4. And for those who are watching online, the live stream will end at the end of this psalm.

Psalm 92 from the beginning. To render thanks unto the Lord, it is a comely thing. And to Thy name, O Thou Most High, do praise aloud to sing. Thy loving kindness to show forth when shines the morning light and to declare Thy faithfulness with pleasure every night.

We'll sing down to the verse marked 4 of Psalm 92. to God's praise. Surrender thanks unto the Lord, it is a calling day.

[ 28 : 23 ] unto Thy name, O Lord, O Lord, I do praise praise the Lord, O Lord, to sing.

Thy loving kindness to show forth when shines the morning light and to declare and to declare my faithfulness with pleasure every night.

On a death-strained and on a death-strained and on a death-strained upon the psaltery.

and on a heart-strained and on a heart-strained with solemn sound and great sweet melody.

and on a death-strained and on a death-strained and on a death-strained and on a death-strained

and in sweet melody. For the Lord, by Thy mighty words, hast made my heart right that, and I will try up in the heart which by night has wear me.