

Delightful Precepts

Lesson for July 21, 2024

Unit II: Expressing Hope

Adult Topic: God's Word Brings Hope

Scriptural Background: Psalm 119:73-80

Printed Text: Psalm 119:73-80

Key verse: "You made me; you created me. Now give me the sense to follow your commands." (Psalm 119:73, NLT)

It is often in our darkest times that God makes His presence known most clearly. He uses our sufferings and troubles to show us that He is our only source of strength. And when we see this truth, we receive new hope. Are you facing a great trial? Take heart. Put yourself in God's hands. Wait for His timing. He will give you a "song in the night."
Our Daily Bread, May 7, 1992.

Unifying Principle

People are often unsure where to seek help and comfort. Where do we find hope, and how do we encourage others in times of need? In Psalm 119, the psalmist finds delight and assurance in God's Word. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 408)

Key Terms

- 1. Comfort** (verse 76) – Consolation. To strengthen the mind when depressed or enfeebled; to console; to give new vigor to the spirits; to cheer, or relieve from depression, or trouble.
- 2. Commandments** (verse 73) – A command; a mandate; an order or injunction given by authority; charge; precept.
- 3. Faithfulness** (verse 75) – Fidelity; loyalty; firm adherence to allegiance and duty. Strict performance of promises, vows or covenants.
- 4. Hoped** (verse 74) – To place confidence in; to trust in with confident expectation of good.
- 5. Kindness** (verse 76) – Act of good will; beneficence; any act of benevolence which promotes the happiness or welfare of others. Charity, hospitality, attentions to the wants of others.
- 6. Understanding** (verse 73) – Discernment; comprehending; apprehending the ideas or sense of another, or of a writing; learning or being informed.

Lesson Background

Psalm 119 is generally thought to be written by David, but the time of writing is uncertain, very probably towards the decline of life. Some think it was written for the sake of his son Solomon. It seems to be a collection of observations on the word of God and its instructions, the usefulness and excellency of it he had made in the course of his life, sprinkled with various petitions for the grace of God, to enable him to observe it.

The psalm is a very extraordinary one; partly on account of the unusual length of it, being more than double the length of the longest psalm in the whole book; and partly on account of its curious composition. It consists of twenty two parts, according to the number of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet; the names of which letters stand between each part; and every part consists of eight verses, all of which begin with the same letter: thus, for instance, the first eight verses begin with the letter a, "aleph", and the second eight verses begin with the letter b, "beth", and so on throughout; hence the Masorah calls this psalm the Great Alphabet. The psalmist may have written in this manner to excite attention to what he said, and also to help the memory.

There are very few verses in the whole psalm, not more than one or two, that does not have something in it concerning the word of God, and its precepts and ordinances. There are nine or ten different words used relative to it, such as laws, statutes, judgments, testimonies. It may also be noted, that there is nothing in this psalm concerning the tabernacle worship, or the rites and ceremonies of the legal dispensation. The design of the entire psalm is to show the fervent affection the psalmist had for the word of God, and to stir up the same in others.

Verses 73-80 seem to indicate the psalmist is experiencing some persisting type of affliction (which he attributes to the hand of God). While he has been promised some great blessing, he as yet has not realized full inner blessing or outward prosperity. Yet, he hangs in there and "waits for God's word" and for the fulfillment of God's promises.

Lesson in Depth

I. Comforted by the Word (Psalm 119:73-77)

Your hands made me and fashioned me: Here the psalmist proclaimed God as Creator, and understood certain obligations to God because he was fashioned by the hands of God.

"Every man is as truly the work of God's hands as the first man was. . . We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Do you take pleasure in the things which you create? The projects you accomplish? The designs you are able to bring to reality? God takes pleasure in His creation – does not make mistakes.

Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments: In his thoughts of God as Creator, the psalmist prayed for understanding. He recognized that this was something often misunderstood, and one could ask for and expect help in understanding both how God created us and what our obligations are to our Maker.

The One who created me physically will surely equip me mentally and spiritually; get the owner's manual from the manufacturer; I am helpless without His wisdom; God knows my frame, that I am but dust; He knows all of my limitations and shortcomings; he knows what sins give me special trouble.

May those who fear You see me and be glad," Faithful Christians Encourage others. This disciple was not so utterly preoccupied with his personal problems that he thought of no one else but himself.

"When a man of God obtains grace for himself, he becomes a blessing to others, especially if that grace has made him a man of sound understanding and holy knowledge. God-fearing men are encouraged when they meet with experienced believers. A hopeful man is a God-send when things are declining or in danger... Hopeful men bring gladness with them. Despondent spirits spread the infection of depression, and hence few are glad to see them, while those whose hopes are grounded upon God's word carry sunshine in their faces, and are welcomed by their fellows." (Spurgeon)

When we hope in God's Word, we have joy in life, and this helps us to encourage others. "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle" (Ian MacLaren). Are people happy to see us arrive or are they happier when we leave? When our friends and acquaintances have burdens, do they turn to us for help, or do we add to their burdens? We are commanded to bear our own burdens courageously and to help others bear their burdens (Galatians 6:2, 5). (Wiersbe)

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous: The godly man is an encouragement to other godly men, for several reasons. First and foremost, he is an encouragement because he has solid hope and a basis for his hope. Hopeful people are encouraging because their hopeful optimism just exudes from them. On the other hand, unbelievers are hopeless and unbelieving, by definition. They may pretend to have a basis for some sort of optimism, but it is all a sham and they know it. Meanwhile, true believers are hopeful because they hang their hopes on the promises of God who cannot break His Word. There can be nobody more optimistic than the man who says, "But now is Christ risen from the dead. . . Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 57).

And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me: This means not only that there was justice in Yahweh's action, but an ultimate good purpose behind it. . . He focuses his faculties upon the pedagogical potential of these divinely issued sufferings ... He knows that God has humbled him. (Zemek)

May Your lovingkindness comfort me: This is encouragement from God's loving kindness.

May Your compassion come to me that I may live: This is the core of this passage. Our ultimate strength cannot be found in men or in any human relationship; we must turn to the Lord to renew our strength and get the grace to persevere in our situation; the Lord is always tenderhearted in dealing with us. The flame of hope is fueled by delighting in God's Word. The God who is righteous and faithful in afflicting me is also loving and compassionate to comfort and deliver me.

God's judgments have to do with Him acting according to His own commandments. There is a difference between a law legislated and a law executed in adjudication. For example, a legislature may pass a law relating to negligent homicide, and only a little later a judge condemns a specific man to execution when he kills a child while driving in a state of intoxication. In both cases, we may ask if the legislature acts righteously and justly and if the judge acts righteously and justly in the specific case at hand. God both establishes law and executes that law in all that He does, and the psalmist here acknowledges that God's judgments are always right. We have no business questioning the appropriateness of God's actions, even, in our own case, where we are subjected to affliction because of our sinful behavior.

Yet, the Christian cannot live without the comfort that God is vitally interested in his good. If God does not deal with us in tender mercies and merciful kindness, there is no hope for any of us, for we all fall short of His standards and His glory. We cannot possibly hope to be saved from our sins unless He takes a special interest in us, justifies us by His grace, enlightens our minds, renews our wills, and sanctifies us by His fatherly work in our lives (by His Spirit). The Christian life is beautifully summed up in verse 77 in two descriptive phrases. First, this life swims in the tender mercies of God, and secondly, we delight in His commandments. When God's people maintain a right disposition towards God's laws, it is clear that they do not feel condemned by that law. How can they feel condemned when they are forgiven by the tender mercies of God?

II. **Vindicated by the Word** (Psalm 119:78-80)

May the arrogant be ashamed: The psalmist said this not only out of a sense of God's righteousness, but also out of a sense of being personally wronged. These proud ones had treated him wrongfully with falsehood; therefore, they should be put to shame. The arrogant have their day; but the day of the Lord is coming.

But I shall meditate on Your precepts: It does not do any good to be consumed with the negative slander of others towards us; nothing we can do to set the record straight or bring about justice; only causes bitterness; we need to be characterized by the love of Christ.

May those who fear You turn to me: The psalmist recognized the presence of proud enemies, but he did not believe that all were against himself or God. There were others who feared God, and he could find companionship with them. They had much in common – they both were those who knew God’s word (Those who know Your testimonies).

“As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord’s people.... It is painful therefore to see Christians often walking aloof from each other, and suffering coldness, distance, differences and distrust to divide them from their brethren.” (Bridges)

Even those who know Your testimonies: Sometimes people only have superficial knowledge of God’s Word – not the type of discernment that drives them to take a stand for justice and righteousness.

May I wholeheartedly follow your decrees: His focus is not merely on external compliance but especially on internal conformity. He knew that integrity of lifestyle only comes from integrity of heart.

The psalmist is meditating on God’s precepts, and he finds great stability, certainty, and confidence in the laws of God. How else might a man know that he is in the right? If he takes God’s side, he can be sure he is on the right side! If he has honestly confessed his sins and repented according to the standards of God’s law, he has no reason to be ashamed, even when men cast aspersions and publicly defame him. When God removes all shame, the believer need never be concerned about the efforts of mere men to shame him. Who cares what men think, when he stands unashamed in the presence of Almighty God!

Lesson Summary

In this week’s lesson we are taught by the repetition of the plea, “**Let....**” Taken together, these make for a healthy life with God.

- Let me be comforted by Your kindness.
- Let me live by Your mercies.
- Let me be vindicated by God.
- Let me be in the presence of those who fear You.
- Let my heart be blameless.

Some of the key applications of this week’s lesson come from Bible Outlines. They include:

1. **Rest in God’s wisdom because He designed me for a purpose.** View yourself as a trophy of God’s grace and glory – Not some cosmic mistake.
2. **Raise the joy level of other believers who witness my faithful perseverance.** View yourself as a blessing to others – Not some disconnected Lone Ranger.

3. **Receive hardship from the hand of a righteous God.** View yourself as a victorious conqueror – Not some pitiful victim.
4. **Replenish strength from God's grace.** View yourself as a forgiven sinner sustained by the grace of God – Not some self-righteous, self-sufficient, self-made man.
5. **Resort to meditating on God's word when attacked by the proud.** View yourself as a protected species – Not some endangered species that needs to take personal vengeance.
6. **Renew fellowship with those who fear the Lord.** View yourself as a brother in the family of God with corresponding support and encouragement – Not some isolated, lonely, separated weirdo.
7. **Remain blameless in heart and shameless in life.** View yourself as a saint pursuing holiness and integrity– Not some embarrassed failure who can't escape the bondage of sin and the corruption of this world. That is how you persevere in waiting for God's Word to come to fulfillment in your life.