

## The Wondrous Word of God

### Psalm 119:17-24

#### Introduction

- “The Scriptures teem with marvels; the Bible is wonder-land...it is itself a world of wonders” (Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 3, 172). These are the words of Charles Spurgeon as he reflected on the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza, stanza Gimel (vs. 17-24), in the “Word of God Psalm,” Psalm 119.
- These verses seem to be “particularly autobiographical” (Boice, 983). Our author is experiencing opposition and persecution for his faith. They find an echo in the Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes where our Lord pronounces a blessing on those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Matt. 5:10-12). With its theme of the “servant,” (v. 17, 23; cf. Isa 53), it is easy for me to imagine the Lord Jesus praying this Psalm in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed and arrested. It was the Word of God that sustained our Savior in His darkest hour. It is the Word of God that will do the same for us. In difficulty and distress, the Lord and His wondrous Word are both our comfort and our counselor. The Psalm easily divides into 3 movements (17-18, 19-20, 21-24).

## **I. Ask God to help you keep His Word 119:17-18**

- Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Obedience to the commands of our Lord is simply a tangible and visible expression of the love that we have for Him in our hearts. We gladly and joyfully obey Him not because we have to. We gladly and joyfully obey Him because we want to!
- And, there are blessings that supernaturally flood our lives as a result of our keeping and obeying God’s Word. We see two of them in vs. 17-18.

### 1) His word is life for God’s servant 119:17

- The Psalmist prays and asks that the Lord would “deal bountifully with your servant.” It is a strong and urgent request. In the psalms the phrase “deal bountifully” carries the idea of deliverance (13:6; 116:7; 142:7; Ross, 483). The idea is help me, rescue me, be generous to me.
- And who is the one making the request? The Lord’s “servant.” It is well to note that not every follower of God is called the Lord’s servant. Abraham is called the Lord’s servant (Gen. 26:24). Moses is called God’s servant (Ex. 14:31; Deut. 34:5; Joshua 1:2). David (2 Sam. 7:5, 8) and Isaiah (Isa. 20:3) are called God’s servant. And of course Jesus is the quintessential servant of the Lord (Is. 53). The servant of God is a title, a position, a status in God’s eyes that we

should all aspire to. In the Bible it speaks of a tender, close and affectionate relationship with our Lord.

- Why does the servant call on His God for aid? The answer is given at the end of verse 17, “that I may live and keep your word.” Jesus teaches us this same truth in Matt. 4:4 when He says to Satan, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Obedience to God’s Word is essential to the life of the Lord’s servant. It is his food and drink. It is the very air that he breathes. I love how Spurgeon puts it, “without abundant mercy [the servant] could not live. It takes great grace to keep a saint alive” (Spurgeon, 171). That great grace of God that sustains our lives is ours through the Word of God.

## 2) His Word is wonderful to God’s servant 119:18

- Three important truths are clearly evident in this amazing verse. First, there are wonderful or “wondrous things” in God’s Torah, His law, his Word. There are amazing, beautiful, captivating, delightful, excellent, and fantastic things in God’s word. Second, we need God to open our eyes to see these wondrous things. (cf. Luke 24 and the two on the road to Emmaus). We need God to remove the blinders, to take away any hindrance to our seeing the wonders of the Bible. Third, we

must pray, asking God for spiritual and supernatural illumination to help us see what is there.

- John Piper captures well the thrust of this verse:

“If God does not open our eyes, we will not see the wonder of the Word. We are not naturally able to see spiritual beauty. When we read the Bible without the help of God, the glory of God in the teachings and events of the Bible is like the sun shining in the face of a blind man. Not that you can’t construe its surface meaning, but you can’t see the wonder, the beauty, the glory of it such that it wins your heart...we must pray to God for supernatural illumination when we read the Bible.” (O Lord, Open My Eyes,” 1-4-98)

## **II. Ask God to help you stay faithful in a world that is not your home**

### **119:19-20**

- “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through” is a song that captures a truth that we discover in the Bible. This world, “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) is not my home. I am something of a foreigner, sojourner, an alien, in a strange and hostile land.
- 1 Peter 1:1 calls us “exiles,” 2:11 says we are “stranger and exiles.”

- Hebrews 13:14 says, “we do not have an enduring city here; instead we seek the one to come.” No doubt the city the author of Hebrews has in mind is the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21-22.
- Colossians 1:13 puts things in proper perspective: “God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”
- So this world is not my home. I live in a different kingdom. I have a different spiritual address and destiny! Still, I’m in this world now. I live in this evil age now. I want to be faithful to my true King and His Kingdom. And, I need His help. I need His perspective! How do I get there and stay there?

1) Know who you are: a person headed to a different kingdom 119:19

- The psalmist says, “I am a sojourner (*CBS*, “resident alien”) on the earth.” He accurately recognizes his proper residency and status in this life. He is not surprised by the fact he feels out of place. There is a “spiritual dislocation” he should feel. As *The Message* helpfully paraphrases “I’m a stranger in these parts.”
- As a sojourner or resident alien in this world, he needs guidance, “clear directions” (*The Message*). He needs an accurate road map to navigate this world on the way to the heavenly kingdom that is his

real home. Therefore he prays, “Hide not your commandments from me.” This is a negative way of expressing the truth of v. 18. Lord, if you don’t “open my eyes” to see the wondrous things in your word, they will be hidden to me. I will not know how to get home without your word!

- Phil. 3:20 reminds us” our citizenship is in heaven.” That is where I’m headed. That is my home. Your word, illuminated by your Spirit, will safely get me there.

2) Know what you need: a passion for the Word 119:20

- The plea of v. 19 is stated even more strongly in v. 20. When it comes to my need for your word, your rules, your decrees, your decisions, “my soul is consumed with longing.” The idea is I am broken, “crushed to pieces.” I am shattered by the internal, intensity of my longing. I am close to the breaking point and will not make it without your word.
- I read this verse and my mind immediately goes to Psalm 42:1-2, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God. I thirst for God, the living God.”
- Spurgeon says, “The desires of gracious men after holiness are intense—they cause a wear of heart, a straining of the mind, till it feels

ready to snap with the heavenly pull. . . .What a blessing it is when all our desires are after the things of God” (173).

- Do not miss that the longing and consuming of our souls is “at all times.” Our passion for the Word is not periodic or episodic! We long continually to know, live and keep this Word.

### **III. Ask God to help you when others oppose you      119:21-24**

- Opposition should never surprise the disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus promised this would be our experience. In his Upper Room Discourse on the night before His passion, our Lord said in John 15:18-20, “If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” Paul adds in 2 Timothy 3:12, “All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
- So prepare yourself. This fallen world will not like you or love you. They will not applaud you as you live for Christ and keep His word (v.17). They will not celebrate the words and works of the real Jesus revealed in the Bible.

- So, opposition is coming. It is to be expected. What then is my proper, Christ honoring response when it does? The psalmist provides two clear principles to guide us.

1) Trust that God will deal with the arrogant and disobedient 119:21

- The psalmist has great confidence in the character and ways of God as revealed in His Word. He is confident that God will deal effectively with those he describes as 1) insolent (*CSB*, “arrogant”), 2) accursed ones (*CSB*, “the ones under a curse”) and 3) who wander from your commandments. These are people who care not one wit about God and what He thinks. What will God do with such persons? He “rebukes” them. Allan Ross points out the word “rebuke” refers to “a verbal activity that causes an effective end to the activities” (Ross, 485). We would say that God stops them in their tracks. He puts them in their place. By His powerful and effective Word He ends their arrogant activities. We don’t have to lift a finger. Our God simply says the word and it is done.

2) Trust God will hear your prayers for relief from persecution 119:22-24

- Verses 22-24 hang together because at the end of each one the psalmist makes a promise about his relationship to God’s Word. In other words he realized he is not a totally passive agent in this



drama between good and evil. He has a two-fold assignment. First, he prays: “Take away from me scorn (*CSB*, “insult”) and contempt.” Remove, like a covering that smothers me, the insults and contemptible words that are on the verge of shutting me down, causing me to consider throwing in the towel, dropping out of the race. Second, he must rightly relate to God’s Word in faith and obedience.

a) While you trust Him keep His testimonies 119:22

The psalmist asks the Lord personally to take away “scorn” (*CSB*, “insult”) and “contempt.” Lord, remove ridicule, reproach and the taunts of the prideful and arrogant from my life. There is a basis for my request: “I have kept your testimonies.” When they opposed me I obeyed you. When they put me down I kept looking up. They told me to walk away from you but I chose to keep walking with you. I chose to obey God rather than listen to men.

b) While you trust Him meditate on His statues 119:23

Powerful people of authority and influence were plotting against the Lord’s servant. They were in their seats of powers plotting against God’s man. Echoes of our Lord’s betrayal can be heard in the distance. In response the servant of the Lord will meditate on

the Word (“your statutes”). He will not fight back or retaliate. He trusts the Word and the God of the Word. He will remain loyal to the Lord, soak in His Word, and trust the Lord to take care of things. Never forget: we don’t fight spiritual battles the world’s way!

c) While you trust Him delight in His counsel 119:24

The Word saves and the Word sustains. And, it will lead us home (v. 19). The psalmist concludes stanza Gimel with a two-fold affirmation: 1) “your testimonies are my delight” and 2) “they are my counselors.” I find joy in your word and I find wisdom in your word. It inspires my soul and it informs my mind. The Word is like a band of brothers who counsel and guide me. As the “men of my counsel” (lit. meaning), I will pay no attention to those who want to see me fail, who want to take me down. I know the trials will come. I know your testimonies will guide me in your way as I make my way home.

### **Conclusion**

As a faithful follower of Jesus, like our Lord, it is inevitable that you will face opposition, ridicule, criticism and conspiracies of criticism. When that happens, let these verses be your guide. As God’s servant, value what He thinks more than

what others think. As His servant delight in His counsel, meditate on his statutes, let your soul be consumed with his Word, and trust Him to take care of your enemies. There are wondrous things in His Word. He will show you. He will help you. He will deliver you. He did it for His Son. He will do it for you, too!