

God and Me Against the World

Psalm 119:49-56

Introduction 1) One of my heroes from early church history is Athanasius (c. AD 196-373). He was a staunch defender of the full deity of the Son of God against the Arians who said he was a created being. Arians are forerunners of modern Jehovah's witnesses. The story goes that when the tide appeared to be moving in favor of the Arians a concerned colleague said to him, "Athanasius, the whole world is against you." His quick and firm response, "Athanasius *Contra Mundum!*" Then Athanasius is against the world.

2) In stanza Zayin of Psalm 119, our psalmist appears to feel very much like Athanasius: the whole world is against me. The arrogant mock him (v. 51) and the wicked who ignore God's law (v.53) seem to be everywhere. Yet one thing remains certain no matter what: God is faithful and God will comfort him in his times of trouble (vv. 50, 52).

3) When everyone seems to be against you, verses 49-56 of Psalm 119 provide both encouragement and guidance for how we should think and how we should respond.

I. Ask the Lord to keep His word to you

119:49-50

When life is difficult it is wise to pray and flee to God. That we do not do it more quickly and more often is simply an indication of our depravity and the fact that sin makes us foolish. A hurting child can always run to a loving Father, and that is exactly what the psalmist does. There is only one specific prayer in this stanza and it is here in verse 49 (Boice, *Living by the Book*, 61). Interestingly the psalmist does not ask for deliverance. He simply asks for God to keep his word so that he may both obey God's word (vs. 51-53) and sing God's Word (vs. 54-56).

1) It will give you hope

119:49

The stanza begins with a prayer for God to “remember” his word to his “servant” (cf. v. 17, 23, 38). This does not mean that God, like a human, can forget. It is a prayer for God to be mindful of his word and to keep or “fulfill the promises he made to his people.” As Alan Ross points out, “The psalmist may be praying for a specific application of the divine promises to protect and bless...” (Ross, 509-10). The psalmist makes his appeal fully aware of the Master-servant relationship he enjoys with Yahweh (vv. 52, 55). It is this relationship that gives him “a waiting

attitude, a positive hopefulness” (Goldingay, *Psalms vol. 3*, 402). He will not doubt. He has hope.

2) It will comfort you

119:50

Those who trust in Christ have the sure and certain promises of God’s Word at their fingertips. However, when we do not see those promises immediately fulfilled there can be some doubt and disappointment. Will God come through? Will He keep His promises? God’s Word answers with a resounding yes. There is no divine “crossing of fingers behind His back” with our God. God’s promises are a source of hope, of confident assurance (v. 49). God’s promises should also be a source of comfort, of consolation and relief (Ross, 510). The psalmist find’s sustaining power in God’s promises. There are troubles (“my affliction”) to be sure, but God will see me through them. Spurgeon is right, “Comfort is desirable at all time; but comfort in affliction is like a lamp in a dark place” (*TBD*, vol. 3, 240).

3) It will revive your soul

119:50

There is power in the promises of God. One promise with power is that God will revive the soul and renew our inner man with strength, courage and resolve when we are afflicted and going through trials. Affliction is

the boot camp, the training field, as it were, to make us stronger.

Michael Wilcock puts it like this, “new life will always spring out of suffering” (*The Message of Psalms 73-150*, BST, 201).

There is a wonderful New Testament complement to this verse. It is found in 2 Corinthians 12:9 where our Lord says to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Suffering isn’t fun. It is, however, the place where we discover our God is sufficient, that he is enough.

II. Remain faithful to the Lord and hate evil

119:51-53

When I began to walk with the Lord as a young adult I was surprised to find Proverbs 6:16-19. After all my mother had wisely taught a young son that we were to always love and never hate. Thus it was quite a revelation to discover that the Bible says, “The LORD hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to him: arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers” (Prov. 6:16-19). So, to hate evil is a good thing because it reflects God’s own reaction and response when the wicked forsake His law (v. 53). Living in a fallen, broken and sinful world, we should not be surprised by evil and wickedness.

Sometimes it is general as in verse 53. Other times it can be quite close and even personal as in verse 51.

1) Know that the arrogant will scorn you 119:51-52

The psalmist says “the insolent” (*ESV*), “the arrogant” (*CSB*), “the proud” (*NLT*), they “constantly ridicule me.” *The Message* says “they ridicule me without mercy.” The verb “ridicule” could also be translated as “scorn,” and it “is related to the word “scorners” in Psalm 1:1” (Ross, 510). Unbelievers who mock God mock God’s servant. They make fun of him for loving and obeying a God no one can see and therefore one who, in all likelihood, is not there. Nevertheless, because God has been faithful to keep His word in the past, the psalmist will not turn away from obeying God’s Word (51). When he calls to mind the ancient words (“rules from of old”) that “have stood the test of time” (Ross, 511), he will find comfort in them and the God who gave them. Scoffers will not drive me away from my God. They will drive me to my God. God’s Word is eternal, true and reliable. I can and will take comfort in that!

2) Know that the wicked care nothing for God’s Word 119:53

The wicked mock the man of God. The wicked also forsake and have no respect for the Word of God. Such disregard for the infallible and

song. Wherever we live and wherever we go we will sing to our Savior for who He is and all that He has done. As a sojourner on this earth (v. 19), I'm just passing through in this life. This world is not my home, but while I am here I will praise my Lord.

- Christians have brothers and sisters all over the world suffering opposition and persecution. Many have found themselves in prison for following Jesus. How does God sustain them? Again and again there are three things that stand out from their testimonies: 1) prayer, 2) memorized Scripture, and 3) songs in their heart language (See *The Insanity of God*, ch. 19). Singing provides sustaining strength to press on.

2) Meditate on His name

119:55

The psalmist says he will remember the name of the Lord (*Yahweh*) in the night. I believe the idea is I will be mindful and meditate on your name when I lie on my bed as I prepare to allow you to give sleep to your beloved (Psalm 137:2). However, the phrase could have a second meaning intended by the psalmist. In the night could also have the connotation when there is darkness in my life.

Perhaps the psalmist uses the concept of night like the apostle John in his gospel. When Judas left the last supper to betray our Lord, John says, “and it was night” (John 13:30). Yes, it was night literally, but it was also night theologically as the powers of darkness came against the Lord Jesus. On that night our Lord was obedient to fulfill the Scriptures that predicted his passion and death. He kept the Father’s law. Meditation on God’s Word in our darkest hour is sure to strengthen and sustain us. After all the word of God will guide us to His name and His name will take us to the Lord Himself.

3) Enjoy His blessings

119:56

Derek Kidner is right, “although obedience does not earn [God’s] blessings, it turns us round to receive them” (*Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 425). Our stanza closes with words that are the “sum of the matter” (Ross, 513). The psalmist has kept the Lord’s precepts. He has obeyed the Word of God. The *ESV* says this happened because “this blessing has fallen to me,” perhaps a reference to obeying the word (v. 56b) or even to the ability to sing even when times are tough (v. 54). The *CSB* goes in a different direction and says, “This is my practice: I obey your precepts.” I think the idea of blessing or reward is more likely. The

reward of obedience is more obedience. The blessing of faithful service is more faithful service (Wilcock, 201). Spurgeon puts it beautifully:

“He had this comfort, this remembrance of God, this power to sing, this courage to face the enemy, this hope in the promise, because he had earnestly observed the commands of God, and striven to walk in them. We are not rewarded for our works, but there is a reward *in* them. Many a comfort is obtainable only by careful living: we can surely say of such consolations, “This I had because I kept thy precepts” (*TOD*, 242).

Conclusion

Athanasius is a hero from early church history. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) who helped abolish slavery in England is a hero from the modern day. He faced great opposition and many defeats in his battle against the evils of the slave trade industry. Several times he became so discouraged he thought of quitting. On February 24, 1791 he received an important letter from John Wesley that would move him to stay in the fight. Its words echo Psalm 119:49-56 and draw from the example of the great Athanasius. A portion reads:

“Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius *contra mundum*, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in

opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God is with you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.”

God and me against the world? With Him on my side, it is more than enough.