

When Pain is the Creator's Plan

Psalm 119:73-80

Introduction: 1) C. S. Lewis says, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (*The Problem of Pain*). If he were alive on this earth today, I believe the author of Psalm 119 would say "amen and amen!"

2) Verses 73-80 constitute stanza Yodh. It is the 10th movement in the magnificent Word of God psalm. It is very much a "prayer stanza" as the stanza begins and ends with prayer, and it is also punctuated with prayer throughout.

3) As a boy, I grew up singing a precious song entitled "Trust and Obey." One stanza, in particular, sounds like a reflection on these verses. It reads:

"Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,
But is blessed if we trust and obey."

Sometimes pain is the Creator's plan and there is blessing when we trust and obey.

4) Now, why is there pain in his plan? Three overarching reasons are given to us in these verses.

I. God made us that we might know Him

119:73

In *The New City Catechism* that came out in 2017, the 4th Question asks, “How and Why Did God Create Us?” The answer: “God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him, and glorify him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory” (p. 23). It would be easy to think the authors of the catechism had this verse in mind, at least in part. God made us and He wants us to know Him.

1) He is our Creator

The psalmist beautifully states, “Your hands have made and fashioned me.” Psalm 139:14-16 immediately comes to mind, “I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well. My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.” Lord you made me and you made me precisely and specifically the way that I am. Nothing was left to chance. The psalmist knew, as should we, that we are not the product of evolution and blind forces of chance. We are hand-

made and hand-crafted by the sovereign God of the universe. We are here on purpose! God made me and God does not make any junk!

2) He is our instructor

Repeatedly throughout Psalm 119 God is referred to as our divine teacher or instructor. The word “teach” occurs no less than 12 times (vs. 12, 26, 29, 33, 64, 66, 68, 99, 108, 124, 135, 171). Wow! Here the word “teach” is not used, but the idea is the same. The psalmist prays to the Lord, “Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.” He prays because he knows he needs God’s help. He is specific. He needs understanding, wisdom, insight, that he may learn God’s Word, his “commandments.”

God blesses us with earthly teachers within the Church. They are his good gifts and we need them. Still, there is no substitute for our heavenly instructor, God Himself. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 2:12-13, “Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.” No matter how smart or educated we are, we never outgrow the need for

the divine teacher to take His Word and give us understanding. God made us for a reason. He made us that we might know Him.

II. God made us to test us so that we might trust Him

119:74-79

Verses 74-79 are “the heart of this stanza” because they are “concerned with the Psalmist’s present affliction” (Ross, 528). The theme of affliction is a reoccurring one in Psalm 119. The word itself appears in verses 50, 67, 71 and here. The important truth we learn in these verses is that affliction and pain may be God’s doing. It is not necessarily a sign of his punishment. It may very well be a sign of his faithfulness. He may be doing it for our good as verse 71 makes crystal clear. There is gain in the pain.

1) Thank God for His faithfulness when afflicted

119:74-75

- 1) Verse 74 begins with a word of confidence in the midst of trouble. The psalmist is confident that deliverance is on the way because “those who fear [the Lord] will see me and rejoice.” God’s faithfulness, steadfast love, and mercy will be seen in his life and there will be rejoicing, a celebration among the people of God.
- 2) The basis of his confidence is multifaceted. First, it is “because I have hoped in your word.” I trust what my Lord says. Second, “I know, O Lord (Yahweh), that your rules are righteous.” You always do the right

thing, in the right way for the right reasons. Your ways are “never wrong, never incomplete, never arbitrary” (Ross, 529). Third, it is “in faithfulness you have afflicted me.” I love the way Ross puts it, “Those who understand the ways of God know that ultimately it is his plan to exalt the righteous and destroy the wicked, but that in his wisdom [and faithfulness] he often humbles the righteous before exalting them” (Ibid). The school of affliction is tough but it provides an excellent education.

2) Ask God for His steadfast love and mercy

119:76-77

- The psalmist has affirmed that all of God’s “rules are righteous” and thus it was “in faithfulness” that the Lord sent afflictions. Still, he needs the Lord’s comfort to live, to endure and persevere through the time of testing and trials. So he makes a request: “Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise.” Let your *hesed*, your loyal love, your covenant love be the comfort that your servant needs and trust (“your promise”) you will send.
- Further (v. 77), “let your mercy (CSB, “compassion,” NLT, “tender mercies”) come to me, that I might live.” The idea is let your steadfast love comfort me and let your mercy take hold of me that I might have strength to live through the afflictions. Then with a word of devotion

and commitment to the Lord he adds, “For your law is my delight.”
Even in my afflictions my love for your word continues unabated.

- We must learn with the song writer that the same God who chastens also comforts. The one who bruises also blesses. The one who takes us down also lifts us up. The one who humbles also exalts. 2 Cor. 12:7-10 provides a wonderful New Testament commentary at this point. It would be good to check it out!

3) Trust God to shame prideful liars

119:78

- It is almost certain that the agents of his afflictions are now revealed in verse 78: the arrogant. The psalmist asks the Lord to put the arrogant to shame. Arrogance pin points their heart and inward disposition. They are puffed up, prideful, “insolent” (*ESV*). Lying pin points their outward behaviors. The psalmist says “they slander me with lies.” In verse 69 he says they “have smeared me with lies.” They have attempted to take the psalmist down with perverse and subversive words. Perhaps he felt his resolve began to weaken under their verbal onslaught. He counterpunches: “as for me I will meditate on your word.” I will stay true to you. I will not crawl into the world of spiritual sewer rats who live and swim in rumors, gossip, half-

truths and outright lies. I will mediate on the word of truth and live in that world. Your word will remain my guide no matter what.

4) Pray that God will vindicate you with the righteous 119:79

- It is always an encouragement to have fellow believers in the foxhole with you when you are under attack. Apparently the psalmist, like Paul in 2 Tim. 2:11-16, felt abandoned and forsaken. Perhaps for a time his friends had been duped by the falsehoods and lies of his arrogant attackers and turned away from him. So, he prays God will act on his behalf with divine vindication. “Let those who fear you turn to me.” Let those who, like me, love you and fear you, come back to me in fellowship and friendship. The psalmist is not unwilling to say, I miss them. I need them.
- Upon their return, he will make known to them the testimonies of the Lord. I will share with them your faithfulness, your steadfast love, your comfort and your mercy in my life. I hope this will encourage them! I know it will encourage me. What I have learned in the school of hard-knocks I will gladly share with others. The lessons were tough. But, they were worth it. I know now that I learned things there I could learn no place else.

III. God made us that we might live blameless and not ashamed 119:80

The Psalmist closes as he began with a petition of prayer. He reminds himself of how intimately connected is the heart and our life, who we are on the inside and how we live on the outside. Proverbs 4:23 is an important reminder, “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.” The psalmist knows he needs the Lord and the Word if he is to have a pure heart and live a blameless life.

1) Pray for your heart

- Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?” The psalmist knew well this truth and so he prays to the Lord, “May my heart be blameless in your statutes.” To be blameless would include being above reproach in thought and motive. Leupold renders it, ““May all my thinking be wholly on Thy statutes.” Wholesome meditation on the divine Word should be our continual occupation” (*Exp. of the Psalms*, 840).

2) Pray for your reputation

The psalmist knew he could not lose his salvation. However, he also knew it is possible for a child of God to “be put to shame.” He did not

want to fail his Lord in either the private or public arena. He knew a basic spiritual truth: be right on the inside and your life will be right on the outside. Spurgeon says it well, “If the heart be sound in obedience to God, all is well, or will be well. If right at heart we are right in the main. If we be not sound before God, our name for piety is an empty sound. Mere profession will fail, and undeserved esteem will disappear like a bubble when it bursts; only sincerity and truth will endure in the evil day. He who is right at heart has no reason for shame, and he never shall have any; hypocrites ought to be ashamed now, and they shall one day be put to shame without end; their hearts are rotten, and their names shall rot” (*TOD*, 290).

Conclusion: No servant of the Lord was ever more afflicted than the Lord Jesus. And yet He knew and accepted that there was good in that affliction and pain. God was being faithful to His Word to crush his servant (Isa. 53:10) that the nations might rejoice in the salvation of the Lord. As our Savior walked the road to the cross, he was comforted by the steadfast love and mercy of His Father. The prideful liars were put to shame on Resurrection Sunday when they found the tomb empty! Blameless in heart and spotless in life, the only shame our Savior bore was ours not his. Pain was the Creator’s plan. But that plan was perfect. We indeed see Him, the Lord Jesus, and rejoice (v.74)!