

What Do You Do When There Seems To Be No Hope In Sight

Psalm 119:81-88

Introduction 1) In his book *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller says, “No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career – something will inevitably ruin it” (p. 3).

2) The song writer of Psalm 119 would heartily agree. He has sought to be faithful and obedient to the Lord. He has tried to live in a way that honors the Lord. Where has that gotten him? He feels like his life is about to go up in smoke (v. 83). He feels like his life on earth is almost at an end (v. 87). As Spurgeon well says, of stanza Kaph, “This octave is the midnight of the psalm, and very dark and black it is. Stars, however, shone out, and the last verse gives promise of the dawn” (*TOD*, 304).

3) There is hope even when we cannot see it. All others many oppose us and even seek our death, but do not despair, in his “steadfast love” our Savior will give us life. Three movements in this stanza take us through the valley of despair to the mountain of hope and life.

I. Admit your need for the Lord

119:81-83

- You really don't know that God is all you need until God is all you have.

This marvelous truth is so often found on the road of suffering, a road marked by anxiety, confusion, despair, disappointment, evil, pain, and trials.

Do any of those words sound familiar to you?

- The Christian life is a battleground not a playground. It is a war and not a vacation. We will not make it without God, and admitting that is crucial. It is essential. The psalmist testifies to his need for the Lord in three specific ways in verses 81-83.

1) My soul longs for you

119:81

The psalmist begins this stanza expressing his dire need for the Lord. I like the way the *NIV* expresses it, "My soul faints with longing for your salvation." There is a clear sense of urgency in this cry. His situation is critical as the following verses make clear. He needs the Lord to intervene and to intervene quickly. Michael Wilcox notes, "In five successive stanzas the psalmist has spoken of his ill treatment at the hands of those who dislike and oppose him. In *Waw* he is taunted (v. 42), in *Zayin* mocked (v. 51), in *Heth* bound (v. 61), in *Teth* smeared (v. 69), and in *Yodh* wronged (v. 78). Here in *Kaph* he is still being molested by the arrogant. . ." (*The Message of Psalms 73-150*, 205). We can sense

that the songwriter feels overwhelmed. If God does not save him he won't make it. The only hope he has is in the Lord and in his word. Thus a declaration of faith is voiced in the midst of his pain, "I put my hope in your word." My longing for deliverance drives me to your word and I will hope in it and it alone. Anything in life that drives us to the Word is a good thing, regardless of the package in which it comes.

2) My eyes look for you

119:82

- The image of the soul (Heb. *nephesh*) in verse 81 moves to the "eyes" in verse 82. The idea, however, is very much the same. Just as my soul hopes in your word, "My eyes grow weary (lit. "fail") looking for your promise." (*CSB*). I am fatigued, worn out, because the promise I've waited for hasn't come. You said you would save me but here I am! Nothing has changed. I've looked and there is no relief in sight.
- Such despair give way to a heartfelt question he will ask the Lord: "When will you comfort me?" In essence he says I look to you and only you for comfort, and if it does not come from you then it simply will not come. Spurgeon provides a helpful word at this point, "This experience of waiting and fainting is well-known by full-grown saints, and it teaches them many precious lessons which they would never learn by any other means" (*TOD*), 385).

3) My life depends on you

119:83

The metaphor of verse 83 is striking. He is like a dried, cracked, worn out, useless wineskin hung up by a fire. The flames and heat of suffering have rendered him useless. He feels as if God is finished with him and he is of little or no value any longer. Yet in spite of all that is happening to him, he has not forgotten or turned away from the Word of God, “I will not forget your statutes.” Your Word remains in me Lord. I am down, but I am not out! I don’t understand, but I will stay with you to the very end. I will keep on recalling your word. What a beautiful truth we see here. Asking questions of God and having faith in God are not incompatible. When we suffer, they often go together. So admit your need for the Lord even in the midst of your doubts.

II. Identify your concerns to the Lord

119:84-87

- “Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine” (Keller, 30).
- Verses 84-87 revolve around the cry for help at the end of verse 86. They list the specifics of his despair and distress. I’ve remained faithful and look

what it's got me. I'm confused. I'm disappointed. I'm hurting. Wisely, he tells the Lord. He recounts or identifies precisely what is going on in his life. I can imagine quite easily our Savior patiently listening to his child pour out his heart.

1) I need your help to endure persecutors 119:84

- Verse 84 is comprised of two questions: 1) "How long must your servant endure?" 2) "When will you judge those who persecute me?" These questions of lament bare his soul once again. If I might flip the questions into declarative statements he is saying, I have suffered enough. I have endured persecution enough. When will you do something about it? From my end I think right now would be a really good time.
- And yet don't miss the critically important point just beneath the surface of verse 84. There will be no personal vengeance on the part of the psalmist. He is a Deuteronomy 32:35 and a Romans 12:19 man! There the Bible says, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord." I may want payback now, but I will wait on God to deliver it on his timetable, not mine. I will complain, but I will not take into my own hands what rightly belongs only to God.

2) I need your help to endure the arrogant

119:85

- The arrogant who care nothing for the Word of God have tracked the song writer down like an animal. They have sought to entrap him having “dug pits for me.” Note the plural. They did not set a trap, they set numerous traps. These arrogant persecutors (vv. 84, 86) come at him again and again from every angle. They are relentless in their goal to take him down and take him out!
- 1 Timothy 3:1 admonished the man of God to be a man who is above reproach, a man of absolute integrity. Only such a man will be able to avoid the pitfalls and the snares the evil one will set to take him down and ruin his life, his family, his ministry and his reputation. When the prideful attack, walk humbly before the Lord in his word.

3) I need your help to endure liars

119:86

All the psalmist can do is rely completely on the Lord and his word, a word he knows is sure, true and trustworthy. He affirms with conviction, “All your commands are true.” Your word is inerrant and infallible! In contrast, the arrogant persecute me with lies, with falsehoods. Will I fight back? Yes, by fleeing to you and crying out for “help!” I again cannot improve on the words of Spurgeon:

“This is a golden prayer, as precious as it is short. The words are few, but the meaning is full. Help was needed that the persecuted one might avoid the snare, might bear up under reproach, and might act so prudently as to baffle his foes. God’s help is our hope. Whoever may hurt us, it matters not so long as the Lord helps us; for if indeed the Lord helps us, none can really hurt us. Many a time have these words been groaned out by troubled saints, for they are such as suit a thousand conditions of need, pain, distress, weakness, and sin. “Help, Lord,” will be a fitting prayer for youth and age, for labour and suffering, for life and death. No other help is sufficient, but God’s help is all-sufficient and we cast ourselves upon it without fear.”

(*TOD*, 306).

4) I need your help to endure the vicious 119:87

Verse 87 resonates with both the theme of death and resurrection (cf. v. 88). The arrogant have so hounded and persecuted me that, “They have almost made an end of me on earth.” Still, he will not forsake his God or His Word. “But I have not forsaken your precepts.” To the very end I will follow you, trust you and obey you. My enemies want to bury me, but I

still believe in you and will obey you. Life, he believes, is on the other side, even if it means death on this side. Verse 88 is just around the corner!

III. Trust in the faithfulness of the Lord

119:88

The life God offers is not one of mere existence. It is a life of abundance and fullness you never had but always wanted, one you always longed for but never achieved. And yet the road to this life is often marked by pain and suffering, and had you not known God is with you and for you, you would have found it unbearable. The path would have been too hard to walk. In this last verse of stanza Kaph the psalmist reminds us of two companions God provides to see us home, companions we can be certain will never leave us or forsake us.

1) You have His love

- “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so” was my favorite song as a child. It remains my favorite song as an adult. The psalmist has endured terrible suffering and injustice. He has been lied about and maybe even beaten nearly to death. Nevertheless, the love of God is not just his hope, it is his life. In words that have the ring of resurrection, he asks his Lord, “In your steadfast love (*CSB*, “faithful love”) give me life.” Restore my life. Revive my life. Renew my life

out of the overflow of your loyal, faithful love, a love that endures forever.

- “The only love that won’t disappoint you is one that can’t change, that can’t be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God’s love is the only thing like that.” (Keller, 304).

2) You have His word

As we move forward in the life God calls us to walk, on one side is God’s love. On the other side is God’s Word. “The testimonies of your mouth” is a declaration of “direct revelation from God” (Ross, 537). It is another witness to the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. God’s word is his companion along with the Lord’s “steadfast love.” Flowing out of the life I have experienced from his “faithful love” will be my obedience to your Word. Because you love me and sustain me, “I will obey you.” Your love motivated me and empowers me to obey you. Your word guides me and informs me how. Your love and your word. Twin gifts to keep me in the battle. Twin gifts to sustain me to the end.

Conclusion

Psalm 119:81-88 poetically and beautifully captures the passion of our Savior. It is a lament that is easy to hear Jesus praying. From his suffering to his death to his

resurrection, it is all there! As Tim Keller again puts it so well, “Jesus lost all his glory so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out so we could get access. He was bound, nailed, so that we could be free. He was cast out so we could approach. And Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took that so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great. A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. And the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous.” (180-1)