

## Psalm 119.17-24

- <sup>17</sup>Deal bountifully with your servant,  
that I may live and keep your word.
- <sup>18</sup>Open my eyes, that I may behold  
wondrous things out of your law.
- <sup>19</sup>I am a sojourner on the earth;  
hide not your commandments from me!
- <sup>20</sup>My soul is consumed with longing  
for your rules at all times.
- <sup>21</sup>You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones,  
who wander from your commandments.
- <sup>22</sup>Take away from me scorn and contempt,  
for I have kept your testimonies.
- <sup>23</sup>Even though princes sit plotting against me,  
your servant will meditate on your statutes.
- <sup>24</sup>Your testimonies are my delight;  
they are my counselors.

HOPE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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We are reading words of the Psalmist and there is a sense in which we are feeling his pain --- suffering and rejoicing that leads to contentment and peace and calm resolve. The psalmist here is just like us; hyper aware of his own failings, doubly aware of how short his life comes to the law. He is also dealing with extraordinary trials, and not just the trials and tribulations common to mankind, but rather those trials that come from wanting to live a life that is defined by righteousness. <sup>1</sup> Yet he knows the goodness and mercy of his God, and makes his appeal with the assumption that Grace is present.

He takes pleasure in taking ownership of his duty and service to God and makes a plea as a servant does to a master; but in this case he avoids a legal claim – as evidenced by his desire for “bounty” rather than reward. He wants the wages earned according to God’s goodness, and not according to his own merit.

“Reward me according to the largeness of your liberality, and not according to the scantiness of my service.”

The psalmist wants only that the Lord treat him as he treats the least of his; for all of his true servants are sons, princes of the blood, and heirs of rich inheritance.

David’s needs were great; he could never earn enough provisions required for this journey. - Liberality of grace, which is lavished upon him by a merciful master.

So he says, deal bountifully – or “do good,” to your servant that “I may live.”

**Some context:** In James Boice’s, “Living by the Book,” Dr. Boice references E.M. Blaiklock, a “well-known bible scholar from Australia.” He suggests that the psalmist is a person we too should know and understand, simply because he is so much like us – at least in these experiences:

1. **For Righteousness Sake**
2. **Alienation**
3. **Slander**
4. **Abasement or Humiliation**
5. **Sorrow**

### **For Righteousness Sake**

Blaiklock first refers to the many mentions of these trials that the psalmist alludes to. He also suggests that in vs. 17-32, there are examples of a specific type of trial, especially related David’s determination to adhere to God’s Word. In other words, it is not just the trials and tribulations...but rather those trials that come to a person when he or she is being persecuted.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:10

We have heard these words of Christ (that David had not yet heard), “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

David begins (in the 1<sup>st</sup> stanza) by talking about the blessedness in living according to the law of God.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza he suggests that the time to start living by God’s law is when a person is young.

Now, we see him talking about someone who is walking in that way. (Boice, 1977)

And what happens is much like what happened when they dredged the river in Salem, where the bottom floor is toxic from years of industry...it stirred things up, adding danger to the waters.

### **Alienation**

David is coming from the perspective that the clock is ticking... that we are just passing through this world for a short while. He asks God for “Life” – certainly on Terra Firma, but most likely a life eternal.

David feels out of place in this world. As do many believers who are alienated from the world because they belong to God. Because the world does not know or honor God, the world does not know or honor His people. David writes of the “arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands” (v.21) and the “rulers” who “sit together and slander me” (v.23).

It is important to know that if you want to follow God’s word, the world will treat you as an alien, for that is what you are. You cannot expect to be at home here. (Boice, 1977)

*Christ said, “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you; “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”<sup>2</sup>*

### **Slander**

Slander, by definition is untrue – a defamation of character. “It has to do with assigning false motives to the good we may be trying to do and even charging us with evil that we do not do.” (Boice, 1977)

It is hard enough for us not to fit in, but to be falsely accused when we are actually trying to live for God and for good is worse. Yet that is what many believers experience.

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<sup>2</sup> John 15:19-20

“The Last three verses of the section appear to be linked together. They relate to the persecutions of the psalmist for his faithfulness to God’s law. In verse 22 he prays that reproach and shame, which wrapped him like a covering, may be lifted from him; and his plea in verse 22b declares that he is cloaked in these because he was true to God’s statutes. In verse 23 we see the source of the reproach and shame, in the conclave of men in authority, whether foreign princes or Jewish rulers, who were busy slandering him, and plotting his ruin; while, with wonderful beauty, the contrasted picture shows the object of that busy talk, sitting silently absorbed in meditation on the higher things of God’s statutes.” (Boice, 1977)

And so what slander does is – it puts us in a corner where if we try to defend ourselves we appear defensive and foolish. When all we can do is take that case to God and lean on his mercy through his word. Letting him be our defender.

### **Abasement or Humiliation**

In the next stanza there is a reference to being “laid low in the dust.” It is like being so low that one actually seems to be bonded to humiliation. It takes hold of the senses; it makes us cry – a lot – so that we are then dried up into rags. The world can drive a godly man to the deeps as they take aim and fire. The dust of battle is often humiliation and pain. And then of course, Sorrow:

### **Sorrow**

Have you ever found yourself weeping after receiving an injustice...when you knew you were right? This trial, for the person seeking to walk according to the way of the Lord, is grief. The writer says that his soul has been made “weary with sorrow” (v28).

There are different things we feel sorrow about.

- The sin of the world
- Loss, either the death of a loved one or through a misunderstanding.
- Being rejected or slandered and humiliated by other people.

Of course our pastor has said that there are two things that cause us to be troubled:

1. Feeling far away from God when we live under the covenant of grace.
2. Feeling close to God when we live under the covenant of works.

And when we are in this place, it is hard to avoid the temptation that this is a punishment from God. We need that assurance that Christ received that punishment and we are merely seeing a shadow of his own pain and suffering. It is a testing that leads to life.

The Psalmist - in trial does not engage himself in foolish inner monologue, but evokes truth to encourage himself, leaning on his master for strength and mercy.

As we walk closer with Christ and take on his attributes, it will seem harder and harder to simply assimilate with the world – and I’m not saying that is what we should be doing.

The odd part is, though, that we will often seem strange to many within the gates...our brothers and sisters who have not yet walked this path. And this is often the most painful challenge because it comes from those who call you “brother - sister.” Those in the church who live in fear can often bring intense discouragement to those who have laid their fears at the cross. Yet even for them, Christ is the way out and mercy is required.

So we have some context of the psalmist who is in sorrow, but is also rejoicing in his perfect master.

He prays for “LIFE” so that he might “KEEP HIS WORD.”

[Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.](#)

“In the *Treasury of David*, Charles Spurgeon cites John Kerr as writing, “A man will never grow into the knowledge of God’s word by idly waiting for some new gift of discernment, but by diligently using that which God has already bestowed upon him, and using at the same time all other helps that lie within his reach.” In other words, if we want to see wonderful things in the Scriptures, it is not enough for us merely to ask God to open our eyes that we might see them. We must also carefully study the Bible. The Holy Spirit is given not to make our study unnecessary but to make it effective. (Boice, 1977)

This is an acknowledgement of how dimly we see things, how limited our scope. There is no bounty more wonderful than something that benefits our soul --- and to perceive the wonders of the bible and to gauge clarity, so that we might determine a clear path, is a wonder to be enjoyed.

We are powerless to remove the defects that bring about a conscious darkness unless God removes it...like the scales on Sauls eyes, so we come before God and ask for clear vision. And the veil is on our hearts, which is so clouded with false privileges and worldly desires...

[I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.](#)

I have already talked about being a stranger on the earth...but we still see this plea to God that he not hide His commands from David. Mortal man knows his days are numbered, but a spiritual man asks God to teach him how to number his days.

He seeks that treasure, which is eternal. Those treasures define his life and he pursues them. And to have them, they must also be given to him by God. So the Psalmist who has said, “Teach me to number my days”<sup>3</sup> now says, “do not hide your commands...” for they are all he has of real value. They remind David of home.

[My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.](#)

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 90

True godliness lies very much in your desires - we do those things we want to do. If we do not do them it is because we do not want to do them. The servant here knows that in order for him to serve, he must know the spirit behind the law, "Love God – Love Neighbor..." For how can he serve God if he does not love? How can he serve man if he does not love? The heart must lead the way or else it is idle service.

But people can often be difficult to love; I mean, how can you love someone who is persecuting you?

He finds love in the word of God. The law of God promotes life. It is a source of truth to a mind clouded by raw emotion. It also tells us when our sorrow or anger is just – so that we can plead our case between man and god. If we are to be found in sin, we can seek the atonement of Christ. If we are found innocent, we can seek justice. And if we seek Christ, who is the end of the law, we can patiently wait for God's perfect justice.

The law is alive...it pauses, it loves, it illuminates a heart, which is condition by the Holy Spirit and nurtured by the believer. And His word gives helps us know that He will exact His justice.

[You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands.](#)

Proud men are a burden to themselves and also to everyone around them. Their lives create a giant sucking noise as they try to manipulate their arguments so that they and those around them are convinced that the world revolves around them.

I was listening to Mr. Powell talk about a survival program, Outward Bound that tests the limits of endurance for teenagers, an age where mortality has not fully entered the framework of their minds. In a society that so dutifully surrounds children with false assurance or comforts, there is little desperation to motivate the young – so we invent false dilemmas in hopes that it will train the young to survive when the real ones arrive. Repelling, mountain climbing, sailing (and bilge cleaning) helps show the limitations of strength and the need to be appropriately humbled before they can be strengthened. Every boot-camp survivor has experienced an appropriate amount of humiliation that is designed to rebuke the prideful into submission.

It shows - even the world knows that there is a curse that comes with being prideful. And God will sure deal with the prideful. Do you remember the headline, "Even God can't sink the Titanic?"

Pride is the most common form of vanities and God will deal with the prideful.

[Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes.](#)

He who does not care about his reputation is not wise. Solomon esteemed "a good name is better than precious ointment." Yet the Psalmist's reputation was tainted by slander.

David's example suggests that the best way to deal with slander is to pray about it, so that God will either remove it or remove the sting. If we seek to clean up our own reputation, demanding apologies, litigation – these attempts will usually end in failure. But take your case to the highest court and leave it to the Judge of all the earth. Rest assured - God will rebuke your accuser.

Do you believe that?

WSC #26: How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

Answer: Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

*“For the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King; He will save us”<sup>4</sup>*

*“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.”<sup>5</sup>*

Those who are innocent may (and should)\_ justly ask to be cleared from reproach - and our request will not be refused. What measure do you have of your innocence.

Of course this verse stands in parallel with the next one.

*Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.*

David is pondering those men who seek his life. He has a choice and he sees the answer. He does not fret.

You can almost see a shrug of the shoulders – a calm resolve. He says, “I’m not worried – I have something better.” They are not my problem. I’ll go back to my treasure and ponder the good life.

Ain't got no place to lay your head  
Somebody came and took your bed  
Don't worry, be happy  
The land lord say your rent is late  
He may have to litigate  
Don't worry, be happy  
Cause when you worry  
Your face will frown  
And that will bring everybody down  
So don't worry, be happy (now).....<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 33:22

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:25

<sup>6</sup> Bobbie McFerrin, “Don’t worry, be Happy.”

So Bobbie McFerrin's words might not give reason to rest – but the good life is yours to treasure and ponder and it was bought for someone who had no bed.

*"Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."*<sup>7</sup> The ultimate slander was already received upon the ultimate man. And purchased with his life was your life.

And of course, this leads us back to resting in Christ. For there is a pattern in this Psalm, which is not immediately visible, but it is clear to me as I put on my scuba gear. And that, which is clear, is that the order of the moral law (10 commandments) is followed here - as is the perfect prayer, which begins, "Our father, who is in heaven..."

David takes the timeless pattern of praying in context of a child approaching the loving father who is ready and willing to help in time of need. He gently places his supplications in the middle, and declares at the end, "for thine is the kingdom."

Though the words aren't explicit, it is clearly implied – in the context of supplication, there is an order of thought and priority – David prepares his prayer with a pondering of whom it is he is approaching and where all glory must dwell.

And this is important because it gives us the basis for our trust while we pray. When the world is crushing you, there is a temptation to feel that God himself is crushing you. We need reminding that God is good, that He loves us, that he is gentle lover of His bride and that He will not strike us down or condemn us. Though He is just in doing so, He channeled that entire wrath onto his son. And it is done, once and for all. And it all points to Him – removing the weight of such matters entirely off our shoulders.

"Our father who art in heaven – Hallowed be thy name..." Because of you, we are enabled to pray to your glory, we are able to obey you as the angels do in heaven; we are enabled to ask for daily bread – knowing you will provide it. We know that we can forgive those who slander us because you have received the ultimate slander.

And we know that yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory.

The pattern is worth pondering each day...and may He place in you the desire to do so.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 9:58