

“Light out of Darkness”
Psalm 119:81-88
(Preached at Trinity, January 20, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Tonight our focus is on this eleventh stanza of **Psalm 119** which is designated by the Hebrew letter Caph - כ. With this stanza we stand at the midway point of the psalm.
James Montgomery Boice calls this stanza the “lowest point in the psalm.”
Spurgeon wrote: “This octave is the midnight of the psalm, and very dark and black it is.”
Spurgeon also writes of the last verse, “and the last verse gives promise of the dawn.”
Actually the first and last of this stanza are filled with hope.
 2. The ancient Hebrews often placed significance upon the shape of the Hebrew letters. The Caph is in the form of a half circle that they saw as a hand held out to receive a blessing. This stanza, although filled with darkness and gloom ends with the hope of blessing:
Psalm 119:88 KJV - "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth."
 3. This life brings with it many trials and afflictions; dark days of gloom. They are all by God’s gracious design.
William Cowper: “*Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.*”
For the child of God our trials are from the hand of our gracious God who is continually conforming us to His great design of holiness.
Sometimes these trials come from the hands of wicked men. Where God works for our good they have evil intents in their hearts. Such is the context of this psalm.
 4. We’ll look at this stanza under three heads:
 - I. David describes his distress in suffering under the hands of his enemies
 - II. David describes his desperation when God seemed to delay coming to his relief
 - III. David describes his delight in the Word of God which was his constant comfort
- I. First we find David’s distress. He finds himself in the midst of fierce enemies.
Psalm 119:81 KJV - "My soul fainteth for thy salvation"
Psalm 119:82 KJV - "Mine eyes fail for thy word"
Psalm 119:83 KJV - "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke"
Psalm 119:85 KJV - "The proud have digged pits for me"
Psalm 119:86 KJV - "they persecute me wrongfully;"
Psalm 119:87 KJV - "They had almost consumed me upon earth"
 - A. He felt entrapped by their evil designs
Psalm 119:85 KJV - "The proud have digged pits for me"
 1. They worked craftily in their evil plans seeking to trap David like an animal
 2. Notice David refers to them as the “proud”
This is one of the chief descriptions of the wicked.
“I want,” “I deserve,” “I’m worthy,” “I’m important”
“I deserve to satisfy every desire, to fulfil every fantasy, to rise to heights of grandeur.” “I want the recognition I deserve.”

3. This is one of the greatest dangers for a pastor.
1 Timothy 3:6 NAS - "not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil."
 - a. Every pastor wants to be well received. He has to resist the impulse to desire the praise of men. Our desire must be to shepherd God's people and glorify God.
 - b. Modern pastors are notoriously motivated by ambition
 Sam Waldron: Be absolutely certain of your calling. Take a passive stance in advancement.
 4. The proud will go to any means to achieve their goals
 Notice David says they "digged pits." This implies continual effort digging multiple pits. It implies great effort.
 5. Rather than bow in shame for their wicked deeds they are described as the proud—their heads are held high in their schemes.
 Do you ever feel justified in gossiping? Are you ever ashamed afterwards?
 We must resist the pride that continues to define our flesh.
- B. David describes their great wickedness
1. He states that in their pride they had forsaken the Law of God
"The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law."
 - a. The proud always feel justified in their actions
 - b. Don't forget David most often described enemies who were of his own people—they were religious people who called upon the name of God.
 - c. If they were Godly, if they were humble, if they were governed by God's Law they would reach in and save the one fallen into a pit. Instead they are the ones who dug the pit.
 There is no love, no mercy
 2. David also describes the injustice of their actions
 - a. They weren't persecuting him because of any wrongful action on his part
Psalm 119:86 KJV - "they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me."
 - b. The righteous upon the earth always suffer for righteousness sake
Matthew 5:10-12 KJV - "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."
1 Peter 3:16-17 KJV - "Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. ¹⁷ For *it is* better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing."

3. We should note that the enemies of the righteous are the enemies of God
David's enemies were lawless.
Matthew 7:23 KJV - "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."
- C. These enemies left him exhausted and in a low condition.
 1. He was at the point of death
Psalms 119:87 KJV - "They had almost consumed me upon earth"
 2. He says in **Verse 81** – "My soul fainteth for thy salvation"
 3. The word means "to be at an end." In other words, he was at one of those points in life where he felt like he was finished, exhausted, at the end of his strength. The KJV & NIV translates it well: "My soul faints."
The NASB also expresses it well – "My soul languishes."
 4. This is at the very point that many lose hope
 - a. A person can come to the point where he feels boxed in with no end in sight.
 - b. They feel there is little prospects for a brighter future ahead
This is the very point that leads some people to contemplate suicide—over 32,000 in the U.S. in 2011.
 - c. While the Christian can fall into great times of distress we have a sure hope.
- D. Even in this drastic condition the psalmist found comfort and hope in God's Word
"but I hope in thy word."
 1. God's Word is an endless source of comfort
 2. It always provides a soothing balm. It contains God's infallible promises

II. David describes his desperation

There are several causes of this desperation—this sense of despair and darkness

- A. The first cause of desperation: The apparent delay in relief -
Verse 82 - "When wilt thou comfort me?"
Verse 84 - "when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?"
Verse 86 - "help thou me."
 1. God seemed distant. David was praying diligently, yet God delayed His deliverance
 2. Sometimes we pray and God's delay can seem like He is not hearing.
 3. We can always find comfort in God's Word. His promises never fail. We can find boundless comfort in His promises.
Geoffrey Thomas – "We should ask ourselves, as we start to pray, whether we have a promise. And is that promise mine simply on the basis that I am a child of God? Yes, indeed there are many exceedingly great and precious promises in the Bible, and they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. These promises are ours, and when we worship God we can pray with the confidence that God will fulfill what He has promised to every Christian."
- B. Another cause of desperation: The intensity of the trial – **Verse 83** - "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke"
 1. The enemies are described in various ways:
They persecuted him – **Verses 84, 86**
They dug pits for him to fall into – **Verse 85**
They were trying destroy him – **Verse 87**

2. Some of earth's trials can seem overwhelming.
David described his adversity as being like a bottle in the smoke
The tents of Arabs were smoky places. A fire was often built in the center for cooking or baking bread and there was no chimney. When a wineskin was empty it was often hung in the tent where it became black and sooty as well as hard and brittle.
In other words David saw his trial as overwhelming—like being in a tent filled with smoke.
 3. Where can we find comfort when all of our earthly possessions are lost to fire or flood?
Where can we find comfort when faced with the death of a loved one?
Where do Christians in foreign lands find comfort when they are imprisoned and tortured because they name the name of Christ?
 4. David says, "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes."
His comfort was in God's Word.
- C. Another cause of desperation: When we take our eyes off of the source of our hope
1. **Verse 84** is one of the few verses in **Psalm 119** that doesn't use one of the synonyms for the Word of God. In his hour of darkness did the psalmist briefly lose sight of the life-giving, sustaining comfort of the Word of God?
Psalm 119:84 KJV - "How many *are* the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?"
 2. Perhaps he is saying that he didn't expect to have many days left. Or perhaps it was the opposite. That in such distress his days seemed far to many. We sometimes find God's servants in the Bible wishing to die.
Jonah
Jonah 4:8 KJV - "And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is better for me to die than to live.*"
Elijah
1 Kings 19:4 KJV - "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, *It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*"
 3. When our eyes are directed away from God and His Word and we begin to focus upon ourselves and our condition we can fall into despair.

Distress, Desperation

- III. Finally we look to David's delight. He found continual relief from God's Word
Psalm 119:81 KJV - "*but* I hope in thy word."
- A. David expresses this hope several times in **Psalm 119**
Psalm 119:49 KJV - "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope."
Psalm 119:114 KJV - "Thou *art* my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word."

- B. For David there was a constancy in looking to God's Word
Psalm 119:82 KJV - "Mine eyes fail for thy word"
 1. He read God's Word continually until his eyes were strained
Psalm 119:82 NKJ - "My eyes fail *from searching* Your word"
 2. God Word was his great delight
 3. Could it be said of you that you read the Word of God until your eyes become weary.
- C. The Word of God provides the standard of God's justice – this too was a great source of comfort for David
Psalm 119:86 KJV - "All thy commandments *are* faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me."
 1. David saw the beauty of God's Law as a perfect rule of justice and knew that God would vindicate His Law.
 David is declaring that he had obeyed God's law and his enemies had not so he was calling upon God to vindicate him.
 2. Also, God's Law is the most perfect way of life. God's commandments bring us the greatest happiness. Whatever suffering David endured because of his obedience to God's Law was worth it.
 This too brought him comfort.
- D. David expresses his ultimate hope in the final verse of this stanza – great light to shine out of the darkness
Psalm 119:88 KJV - "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth."
 Literally: "Revive me according to Thy love."
 1. God has promised His love to those who follow Him.
Exodus 34:6-7 NAU - "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin"
 2. David prays for God to revive him according to His love. In the midst of this fiery trial God's promise of love would sustain him.
 And where do we find the testimony of this love? In God's Word.

Conclusion:

1. When we go through the dark times of life we can either look inwardly at our distress or we can look to the promises of God in His Word.
2. We can either fall into despair and depression or we can look to the God of our strength.
Psalm 42:5 KJV - "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance."
3. May we make God's Word our daily delight and our constant source of comfort.