

Psalm 119: 153-160; "True to Perfection",
A Communion Sermon prepared for September 3rd, 2008,
by Pastor Paul Rendall, In the Morning Worship Service.

Whenever we are afflicted, whenever we are persecuted, whenever we are oppressed in our spirit because of the oppositions and oppressions of the evil one and evil men, we need to turn to our God in prayer, and ask Him to revive us. This is what King David is telling us that he did, in this passage of Scripture. It goes hand in hand with the Lord's Supper which we will observe this morning, because no doubt our Lord Jesus Christ died for this. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins upon the cross of Calvary, but I am hoping that you will also be able to see that He suffered for this also; that you would be revived in your darkest hours of your earthly journey. You who believe in Jesus Christ need not only His righteousness that you would be justified and be given the gift of eternal life, but you should know that you also need His strength in order that you may be able to bear up under every trial. The way that the Christian finds this strength to bear up is by learning more and more to pray. Jesus said that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke 18: 1) And Psalm 105, verse 4 says, "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!" "Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth, O seed of Abraham His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!" We are here to remember the marvelous works of Jesus Christ, and the wonders that God did through Him at the cross, and the wonders which He does for each and every one of His chosen ones who is trusting in Him.

These marvelous works and these wonders will also be done for you, the praying believer, in order to strengthen you, in order that you might continue to do the will of God, and glorify God in the time of affliction and trial. The revival of the spirit of the oppressed believer comes through God taking His blessed Word bringing home certain truths to his heart with power. God will bring you strength through the strength of Christ given to you. How did Christ purchase this strength? Christ purchased strength for you to bear up under oppressions of spirit by His praying these same prayers of David when He was oppressed in spirit. He prayed, as David did, that God would consider 3 things which were true to perfection in him. They were not true to perfection in David, although David is probably the author of this psalm. And they are not true to perfection in any other man; but they were true to perfection in our Lord Jesus Christ. The first is that Christ did not forget God's law. The second is that Christ did not turn from God's testimonies. And the third is that He loved God's precepts. David prayed and pleaded with God using these words, but the greater David prayed and pleaded in the greater and more perfect way of His heart's perfect obedience so that king David's prayers would be answered. Even though Christ lived a thousand years after David, nevertheless David's prayers were answered and he was revived in his

spirit because of what Christ who came after him, would do. If David's prayers were answered favorably so many years before Christ came and suffered and died; because of Christ's prayers and His perfect obedience; then ours prayers will also be answered so many years after He suffered and died; even today, if we are oppressed in spirit, if we are trusting in Christ and praying in this same way. Remembering these truths we will approach the Lord's table later in this service.

The 1st thing which was true to perfection in Christ was that He did not forget God's law. (Verses 153-155)

David says, "Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law." "Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word." "Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes." David was a man who experienced affliction and he wanted deliverance. The reason for this affliction is found in verse 157 where he says, "Many are my persecutors and my enemies...." Here in these first few verses, David in prayer, is contrasting before God, his not forgetting God's law, with his wicked persecutors and all wicked people in general; the fact that they do not seek God's statutes. It is on this basis that he asks God to consider and deliver Him. In saying that he does not forget God's law, he is actually saying that he is remembering it to do it. He seeks God's statutes in order to keep them and to do them. I am sure that he is not saying this in the sense of the covenant of works. He is not saying that he never forgets to do the right thing and that God should deliver him because he is always perfect in His obedience. He is saying, however, that by grace it is his overall practice. His overall practice is to be godly; to remember God and His Word. And it is because he obedient to God, to remember His commandments; this is the reason that he is persecuted. When you take up the life of a Christian, you take up a life of not forgetting God or His law. You remember His law, His word. You seek His statutes. The definition of a wicked person is one who forgets God and doesn't seek His statutes. Those who forget God and His law, His Word, will most certainly perish forever. Turn over with me to Psalm 9 for a moment. This is a psalm of David which speaks about what God will do with those people and nations that forget Him. Here again, David is being persecuted by his enemies. He says in verse 17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget God." "For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever." Sometimes this seems to be the experience of the Christian. But look at verses 19 and 20. "Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged in your sight." "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." In other words, wicked men because they do not know God, do not know the strength that He can, and does, give to those who are trusting in Him, to those who remember Him and His statutes. God will forget forever those who forget him in the way that they live their lives. But God will not forget those who do not forget him in the way they live their lives. But this is not something that comes automatically to the Christian and so it is always right to pray to God and ask that you would be revived according to His Word.

The only way for the Christian to bear up; the only way for the Christian to be sustained in being faithful to God's Word is by the grace of Christ which comes through prayer.

A Christian is one who will be persecuted if he is godly. We are told this in 2 Timothy 3: 12. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." This is the truth of the matter. But we should also remember the words of Paul which go before that statement. "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra-- what persecutions I endured." "And out of them all the Lord delivered me." I like what Thomas Manton says about these verses that we are studying in Psalm 119. He says, "A Christian is too strict and pure for the world, and is not strict and pure enough for God; and therefore must look for afflictions to mortify sin from God's hand, and great enmity from the world, if he means to keep up the majesty of his profession." A little later he says, "Well then, we must be daily ready for all these things; for if we take up the profession of stricter Christianity with other thoughts, we should soon see our mistake." "It is a vain thing to flatter ourselves with the hopes of a total exemption; many think they may be good Christians, and yet live a life of ease and peace, free from troubles and afflictions." "This is all one as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself peace and continual truce with the enemy; or as if a mariner committing himself to the sea for a long voyage should promise himself fair weather and a calm sea without waves and storms; so irrational is it for a Christian to promise himself a life of ease and rest upon the earth."

All right; if this is going to be the lot of the serious, godly Christian, then what should we remember to do in our afflictions? I would say, from these verses, we must pray. And we must pray remembering Christ. Remember, as you come to the Table this morning, that the only reason that you do not forget God's law as a Christian is because of Christ. Christ never once forgot God's law. He remembered it perfectly by meditating upon it day and night. He did not forget to pray and ask God to plead our cause. Our cause is the cause of Christ; the cause of truth and meekness, and righteousness. He knew that it was because wicked men had forgotten God's law that He was being persecuted. He knew that it was because his enemies could not convict Him of sin that they hated him. It was because He was perfectly faithful that He was afflicted by wicked men. It was because He was perfectly righteous and obedient that He was afflicted by God and smitten at the cross. You say, "How could this be just in God; that He would afflict His righteous Son at the cross?" It was because God knew that you were without strength in yourself to keep the commandments of God perfectly as Jesus did. Therefore, out of His love for you, the sinner, He would afflict His only-begotten Son Jesus in your place so that you could be forgiven. God the Father would have regard for the righteousness of His Son's life, remembering His Son Jesus in all of His obedience to His law, so that you would be justified. He would do this to His

Son Jesus so that you would not forget His law, and so that you would be sustained in all your afflictions. Jesus alone was true to fine points of perfection in keeping the law of God. This, my beloved brethren, is the basis of our being sustained and upheld during all of our afflictions, and the basis also of our deliverance from all of them as well. What was the basis of David's confidence when he said that he had not forgotten God's law? Was it himself, or was it the grace which God had given him? It was God's grace for sure, for he prays for God to revive him in verse 154. A person only prays to be revived if the life of God working in his soul to keep him persevering in his faith and obedience, has fallen low. We do not sustain ourselves in the Christian life. God, through Jesus Christ sustains and upholds us. Therefore we remember our Savior who is the One who pleads our cause and will deliver us; redeeming our life from all distress.

Then 2ndly - The thing which was true to perfection in Christ is that He did not turn from God's testimonies. (Verses 156-158)

"Great are Your tender mercies, O Lord; revive me according to Your judgments." "Many are my persecutors and my enemies, yet I do not turn from Your testimonies." "I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your words." The thing that is hard for the Christian who has many enemies and many persecutors is to continue to faithfully walk with the Lord, not turning from His testimonies. The temptation is to turn from what God has said is true and what God has said is right, in order that there will be an end of the persecutions. The temptation is to take matters into one's own hands to enact justice ourselves, or to go the other direction and become timid and cowardly in doing the will of God. The temptation is to give in to the demands and expectations of the persecutors so that you as a Christian can have peace and safety and live your life unmolested by wicked people. The reason that they persecute you is because they are looking for you to turn from the truth of the Bible at some critical point where you either you want to hold fast to it, a point where you are, honoring, obeying, and glorifying God by holding to that truth, and living it out. Who were the persecutors of David, the man who wrote these words? Was it not Saul, the first king of Israel, and then 20 years later David's own son Absalom? It was those who dealt treacherously with him. There were many who sided with Saul and Absalom from the motive that it was politically expedient to so. This was no doubt disgusting to David, as is said in verse 158 of our translation of the Bible, the New King James. But I think that the old King James is better yet. It says, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved." Calvin translates it, "I saw the perfidious and chide with them." To be perfidious is to be unfaithful or disloyal. When we see how treacherous, unfaithful, and disloyal Saul and Absalom were to David, should it surprise us that there will also be people who will act towards us in the same way? In the case of Saul, David had done nothing to provoke Saul's envy and ill-will except to slay the Philistine, the very enemy of God's people who everyone else was afraid of. Because of envy, over the acclamations of the women who came out singing and saying "Saul has slain his

thousands and David his ten-thousands," he persecuted David. David said a number of times, "I will not stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed." He wanted the Lord's mercy to be shown to Saul. At points he chided with Saul over his treachery and his sin. But he would not take matters into his own hands to kill Saul, even though on two occasions he had the opportunity to do so. In the case of Absalom, his treachery arose from his sins of pride and selfish ambition in relation to his father. Some of what Absalom perpetrated against David came upon him as a part of the disciplinary process which God brought upon him for his sin with Bathsheba. But in this case, when persecution and opposition came to him, David did not turn from God's testimonies. He longed for his son Absalom to repent and to find mercy from God. He said to his commanders Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." Joab did not show Absalom mercy, and killed him when he had the chance. When David heard of it, it says in 2 Samuel 18: 33, "Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept." "And as he went he said thus" 'O my son Absalom--my son, my son Absalom--if only I had died in your place!"

This is the kind of tender mercy that God show to us in our conversion to Christ. Christ did die in our place. We respond, "Great are your tender mercies, O Lord...." "Revive me according to Your judgments". In other words, we may see the treachery of our persecutors. We be disgusted by the sinfulness of their words and actions. We are most definitely concerned for the honor and glory of God. But if that is really the case, we will not turn from God's testimonies to taking our own revenge, or holding grudges against those who have done us wrong. If we are like David we will not turn from God's testimonies. The reason that David was able to have feelings of grief over the sins of Saul and Absalom and still have feelings of compassion towards them was because he had the grace of Christ at work in his heart. Saul and Absalom were not keeping God's word in relation to him, and yet he did not hate them; he did not wish evil upon them; he did not take matters of justice into his hands. Why? Because he knew how great God's tender compassions and mercies had been toward himself. He was taught by the Holy Spirit of God to know how great his own need was to be forgiven of his own sins. He prayed in Psalm 51, after his sin with Bathsheba, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit." You see he was being upheld in his trials and afflictions. He was being taught by God to able to do His will and to love those who had become his enemies. I am saying that he learned this by the grace of God which was coming to him based upon the life and work of Jesus Christ who would come later in time to His Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world; the Lion of the tribe of Judah to give him strength to stand in the evil day.

You see this same thing in the life of Jesus Christ, and in Him it is lived to perfection. Turn over with me to Matthew 5: 38. Here we see it first of all, in His

teaching. "You have heard it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'" "But I tell you not to resist an evil person." "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. That was Christ's teaching. Let me ask you this as you come down front now to celebrate the Lord's Supper, "Do you have the attitude of David and even more, do you have the attitude of Christ when it comes to being persecuted?" Are you concerned with the dishonor which is done to God by sinners even more than the dishonor that those sinners are doing to you in their persecution of you? It is said of Jesus prophetically in Psalm 69, verse 8, "I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children; because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me." As you come down front I want you to think about what it took Jesus to save you from your sins. He had to bear the reproaches of sinners against Himself so that you would have your sin debt paid, and your reproach in God's sight taken away. These are His tender mercies to you. What would He expect of you, now in the time when you need to be upheld; in the time when your spirit is oppressed because of the sinful words and actions of men around you? He would expect you to have His mind and His heart working in you because of His grace. He would expect you to hold fast to His Word and to pray that even those who persecute and mistreat you would be forgiven. Can you do this? Let us come down front and I will have a few more words for you before we partake of the Supper.

The 3rd thing that was true to perfection in Christ was that He loved God's precepts. (verses 159 and 160)

David prays in verse 159, "Consider how I love Your precepts." "Revive me, O Lord, according to Your lovingkindness." We have seen how David prayed, "Revive me according to Your word" in verse 154. We have seen how he prayed, "Revive me according to Your judgments," in verse 156. And now we find him saying, "Revive me according to your lovingkindness." Each and every believer needs to understand that this kind of reviving comes to our souls only through the grace of Christ. When David says, "Consider how I love Your precepts," he is not saying this boastfully. He is saying it humbly, realizing how dependent he is upon God for all the love that he does have for God's word. Do you understand this, dear believer, as you approach the table today? All the strength for David's obedience, and all of His determination to hold fast the word of God, and all of his ability to live seeking God's honor in the way that he faced persecution; all of this came from God's grace purchased by His Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ. If he were here today, he would thankfully tell us that it was so. But here we are at our

Lord's table, about ready now to partake of these elements of His blood and His body. And we need to see that His prayer was the prayer of David's at the point of His death. "Consider how I love your precepts." "Revive me, O Lord according to Your lovingkindness." Turn to Psalm 69, verse 13 with me. This is a psalm of David once again. But it is also a prophetic prayer; prophetic of what Jesus thought in prayer when He was upon the cross. "But as for me, my prayer is to You, O Lord, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, Hear me in the truth of Your salvation." "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters." "Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut its mouth on me." "Hear me, O Lord, for Your lovingkindness is good; turn to me according to the multitude of your tender mercies." This is the fulfillment of the prayer, "Revive me, O Lord, according to Your lovingkindness." God did answer this prayer. God gave Christ strength to be upheld in the Garden of Gethsemane. You will see this if you turn over to Luke 22, verse 39 and following. "Coming out of the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him." "When He came to the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.'" "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father if it is Your will, take this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will but Yours be done.'" He could have just as well said, "Consider how I love Your precepts." "Revive me, O Lord, according to Your lovingkindness." Then verse 43 says, "Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him." This was part of the answer of His prayer. He was about to be betrayed by one of His own disciples and taken by a mob of wicked men with the power of Roman soldiers with them, to a false trial. Look down at verse 49. When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, 'Lord shall we strike with the sword?' "And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear." "But Jesus answered and said, 'Permit even this.'" "And He touched his ear." There is Peter taking matters into his own hands. Peter who would be so zealous now in a wrong way, but deny him only a little later in time. But Jesus would love His enemies. Look how much He loved them. Luke 23: 33 says, "And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand the other on the left." "Then Jesus said, 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'" This is one of the ways that our Lord was upheld and revived and strengthened to do God's will in enduring the sufferings of the cross. He forgave His enemies even as they were sinning against Him. His purpose was to save the Elect among them. He wanted to show them how great God's mercy could be to them even then. What about you, dear Christian believer? Let me ask as you come to Lord's table now whether Have you have forgiven, from the heart, each and every person that has sinned against you in word or in deed? Are you showing others, who have sinned against you God's willingness to forgive by your doing as Jesus did? You may never by your forgiveness be able to change those persons

who have sinned against you, so that they will repent of their sins at this time. That may be your desire, but that is not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to forgive from your heart, even so. If you cannot do this, then I do not believe that you have not seen the meaning of this Supper as clearly as you should. When you came to Jesus Christ for salvation did He forgive all of your sins; that great debt which you could never pay? He most certainly did. Then, when someone sins a sin against you; can you really hold this sin against them, and withhold the forgiveness of your heart, suspending it upon their asking forgiveness for you in the way that will be acceptable to you? You may never have that opportunity. They may die before that happens. The debt that they owe to you is much less than that which you owed to God. You must forgive them from your heart even if they have never told you that they have repented and you are able to joyfully grant them your formal forgiveness. Forgiveness of offenses against ourselves is first of all, to the one who has been offended, a matter of the heart in the sight of God. If you doubt this, go back and read Matthew 18: 21-35. Let us come to this table today forgiving others from the heart, for all of their sins against us, even as God has forgiven us all of our sins against Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. His grace shall sustain us in the times of our persecutions and trials. He died for this.