

Abiding Hope

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Date: 02 October 2019

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Psalm 119, 73, verses 73 to 80. I'll read it out loud for us. Your hands have made and fashioned me.

Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant. Let your mercy come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.

Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood. As for me, I will meditate on your precepts.

Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies. May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame.

[1 : 12] The main point of this psalm is that even in affliction, we can hope in our faithful God and in his righteous word.

And it's divided kind of into two sections. We see a profession of hope in verses 73 to 75, and then we see his prayers for help in verses 76 to 80.

And this stanza begins, and I'll really focus on this for much of the psalm, much of the sermon. It begins with a much-needed reminder in verse 73 of our creatureliness.

It says, your hands have made and fashioned me. So we're created beings, like we're creatures.

And this is, if you think about it, if you reflect on it, it's a very sobering and humbling reality.

You know, because we don't like to think of ourselves this way. We're prone to forget it. We like to think, as humans, that we're these masters of our own fate.

[2 : 13] Right? It's the autonomous, you know, sovereign beings, unaccountable to God. I think you were laughing probably because you know the poem. Yeah.

It's a 19th century English poet named, what's his name, Herbert something? Herbert. He wrote a, he captured this kind of human hubris in his poem entitled *Invictus*.

And he writes at the end, he says, it matters not how straight the gate, not straight A-I-G-H-T, but straight S-T-R-A-I-T, like how narrow, you know, the gate.

How charged with punishments the scroll. I think these are explicit biblical allusions. He's mocking scripture, basically. He's saying, I don't care how narrow the gate is to eternal life.

I don't care how severe the punishments are in the scroll of the Lamb in Revelation 5. Right? And then the last two lines are, I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

[3 : 12] Right? I mean, that's his attitude. Right? It's a, I will not be constrained by God's laws. I will live for myself. I am the master of my fate. I'm the captain of my soul. Really appalling arrogance.

Right? It's a, it's kind of a galling ignorance too. It's God is the creator. We're the creatures. He fashioned us. He, his hands have made us.

We're creatures. And if we're creatures, God made us. We're not unaccountable. We're accountable to him. We depend on him. We're not autonomous beings. We're not masters of our own fate.

And in this, it's this pride in ourselves and, and unbelief in God, which really are two sides of the same coin that are at the root of all of humanity's spiritual ills. Right?

Instead of coming under the authority of God and his word, like we put ourselves over God and his word. Right? To judge it. To cherry pick through it. To discard it. To ignore it. We let our own flawed subjective sense of right and wrong guide us instead of letting God's righteous word guide us.

[4 : 16] But verse 73 of Psalm 119 teaches us that creatures, as creatures, we should assume that this humble posture of learning. It says, give me understanding that I may learn your

commandments.

We should be submitted to the creator. That's the natural order of the universe. But this verse doesn't merely speak of our creatureliness. It also speaks of God's special care for us. And it says, because it says in verse 72, that God's hands have made us and fashioned us. Right? So God is spirit, as we know from John 4, 24.

So he doesn't have hands, literally physical hands. Right? Unless you're speaking about the incarnated word. Unless you're speaking of the son. So this is an example of anthropomorphism. Right? A poetic device where you kind of attribute human characteristics to God. And it's, but it's intended to convey the kind of way in which God took special care to make us.

[5 : 20] He fashioned us with his own hands. Made us. Genesis 1 to 2 speak of this. Right? God creates the entire cosmos simply by speaking. Right? But when it comes to humanity, in Genesis 2, 7, it says, the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

The noun form of the Hebrew verb for form means potter. He formed. He handmade. Right? It conveys God's intimate kind of artistic personal involvement in the creation of humanity. And as a potter shapes the formless clay into a piece of pottery, God formed mankind with his own hands, figuratively speaking. So that means we're handmade. Right? And I own almost nothing that's handmade.

Right? Because handmade things are expensive. Right? I mean, it's like, that's, yeah. Because it shows that special personal care went into the product.

Right? If you have handmade jewelry, that's special. Right? It's, and we're such creatures. God formed us. He fashioned us with his hands.

[6 : 32] That shows his special care for us. That also should make us more eager to learn from him. Because he cares for us in such a way. To submit to him. To follow him. We belong to him so we can trust him and follow his commandments.

And it's that foundational faith of verse 73 really kind of undergirds everything that follows. It's that foundational faith that enables the psalmist to have persevering faith and hope.

Look at verses 74 to 75. It says, Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice because I have hoped in your word. I know, Lord, that your rules are righteous and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Again, we saw in the last stanza the idea of, in our affliction, God has done good to us. If you guys remember that. But we see a similar idea here.

We don't know exactly what the kind of affliction that he's facing is. But we know from kind of the few verses down that he has enemies. Right?

[7 : 34] Who are either slandering him or, you know, wronging him somehow with falsehood. So it's probably some form of slander. And they're insolent in their treatment.

And so that may be connected to this affliction. Yet, even though there are people who are perpetrating this evil, the psalmist knows that ultimately no affliction comes to him apart from God's sovereign permission or sovereign guidance.

Right? So he says it's God who in faithfulness has afflicted him. Right? In the same way, Job, right? When natural disasters come or when, you know, the, I guess, the roaming kind of mobs or people kill his servants or children.

In the end, Job doesn't say, well, it's these, it's nature, you know, that took God away. Or it's these people that took, I mean, not these nature that took my children away.

Or these people that took children away. He says God gave and God has taken away. Right?

Ultimately, the ultimate agency is with God. And so here, he's likewise, the psalmist says, in affliction, in faithfulness, you have afflicted me.

[8 : 52] I mean, going back to that pottery imagery, let's think about it for a second. Right? If you're a clay, and let's say that you're a clay that's sentient. Right? You are able to think. And imagine the potter lopping off, you know, pieces of your potter on the potter's wheel.

Right? Or, even worse, throwing you into an 1800 degree Fahrenheit kiln. Right? For you to bake. Right? It's like, those are not things. Right? It's like, it sounds like great affliction.

Right? But if this clay were not only sentient, but also wise, the clay would know that the potter is doing it. That he has a design.

He has a purpose. That he's doing it for his good, in the end, to make him something worthy of his creation. Something useful. Something beautiful.

And that's the hope of the Christian. Right? If we know that God's rules are righteous. If we know that in faithfulness, in truthfulness in his own character, that he is afflicting us.

[9 : 59] Then we can endure. Because it comes from the hand of our loving Father. And so that's the profession of faith. And after professing his hope in God, the psalmist prays for help in verses 76 to 80.

Because even, it's not easy to persevere in faith and hope. These things don't come naturally to sinful people living in sinful world. We need God's help.

And that's why prayer is necessary. And that's why 19th century Anglican pastor J.C. Ryle says, Faith is to the soul what life is to the body.

Prayer is to faith what breath is to life. Right? So he's saying we cannot live without breathing. So we cannot believe without praying.

He's saying that prayer, because it's the activity, really the defining activity of faith, that you cannot be a Christian and not pray.

[11 : 00] That prayer flows from faith. And because we need God's help. That's what it means to be a Christian, is to be someone who recognizes our need for God. And psalmist has this unshakable confidence that the Lord will come to his aid.

So he prays. And he has this confidence because he knows the character of God. Right? Look at verse 76. This is, Let your steadfast love comfort me. And in verse 77, Let your mercy come to me. Right? He expects God to answer him because of God's steadfast love. Because of God's mercy. Not because he is amazing. He's deserving of it. But because God's gracious.

Because God's steadfast in his love. Because God's merciful. And so he knows that in the end, even though right now he seems to be in the midst of affliction and maybe even experiencing some shame, that in the end that God will be faithful to his word.

And that the insolent, the rebels, the evildoers will be put to shame. And then he says and repeats that word in verse 80. May my heart be blameless in your statutes that I may not be put to shame.

[12 : 07] He knows that if he keeps God's word, that he will not be put to shame. And that faith is universal. As we know, if we don't believe that we will be vindicated in the end, that we will be proven right in the end in following God's law, it's difficult to persevere in that, especially in the midst of persecution and opposition.

And this psalm and this stanza, again, is fulfilled ultimately in what Jesus does for us because he's the one who gives us a hope that will not be disappointed, that will make us never be put to shame. Isaiah 28, 16 prophesied, Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation.

Whoever believes will not be in haste or will not be shamed. And that's quoted in 1 Peter 2, verses 6-7, Romans 9, 33, Romans 10, 11.

And it's cited as fulfilled in Jesus, that Jesus is the cornerstone. He's the one who fulfills the promises of God so that those who hope in him will not be put to shame because he dies for sinful people, gives his righteousness, imputes that righteousness to his people.

[13 : 43] And after he ascends, he sends the Spirit of God as a down payment and to assure us in our hearts that we are adopted children of God so that we can have a sure hope that will not be put to shame.

And it's by believing in Jesus that we can really live like the psalmist of 119, 73 to 80 with the hope that will not be put to shame.

Let's pray with that in mind. Maybe we could sing another song, Brian.