

Witness of the Word

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 119 verses 41 to 48 today. I'll read it out loud for us.

It says, And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules.

I will keep your law continually forever and ever, and I shall walk in a white place, for I have sought your precepts. I will also speak of your testimonies before kings, and shall not be put to shame, for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.

I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love. And I will meditate on your statutes. So this strophe or stanza, this unit of poetry kind of begins with prayer for deliverance.

Really, this whole section is about how those who delight in God's rules, God's law, those who trust in God's word, bear faithful witness to it.

[1 : 3 0] And the first part, the first three verses, verse 41 to 43, is a prayer. It's a prayer of a faithful witness. And then verses 44 to 48 is a pledge of a faithful witness.

And so it begins with the prayer in verse 41. Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise. And it seems that he's in a situation, kind of a bad situation that he needs God to save him from.

And it seems that there's some enemies that are taunting him. So they're taunting him, saying, where is your God? God, if your God is all that you say he is, then why are all these things happening to you?

And where is the God that you put so much hope in? But the psalmist hasn't abandoned his hope. He has held on. And so he asks God for deliverance.

Lord, let your steadfast love, your unchanging love come to me. Your salvation according to the promises you have given me. And only then shall I have an answer for these people who are taunting me.

[2 : 3 5] So that's what he's holding on. This is a great picture of faith seeking understanding. I don't know if that's a phrase you guys have heard. Often when people, bad things happen to Christians, sometimes they get doubt which leads them to despair.

This is happening to me. I don't know if God's really with me. I don't know if God really loves me. I don't know if God really is in control. It's a doubt that leads to despair. In contrast, faith seeking understanding says, you know, my experience is contrary to God's promise.

What I know about God. But instead of saying, therefore God must not love me or God must not exist, faith seeking understanding says, this is what I believe and Lord, please help me to understand.

I know this might. So instead of letting our experience dictate our faith, this person, this psalmist is letting his faith dictate his experience, make sense of what he's going through.

Lord, I believe. Lord, I believe. But help me. Deliver me. Show me. That prove to me that your word is true, which, because I believe it, I hold on to it. And so he says, then he will be able to answer those who taunt him.

[3 : 49] And he will not take, and he prays, continues that prayer in verse 43. Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules. He's still hoping in God's word. And so he doesn't want God to take away his testimony.

He wants him to preserve him, so that he can continue to bear witness to God's truth. And that's the prayer of a faithful witness. And then in the latter half of the psalm, we see the pledge, pledge of a faithful witness.

It says in verse 44 and 45, I will keep your law continually forever and ever, and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts.

So the word continually suggests without pause, without ceasing. And then forever and ever suggests without an end, without a terminus.

So he's saying without ceasing, without pause and without end, I will continue to keep your law. I will keep your law. And so it shows to us what life of obedience should look like.

[4 : 54] Obedience is not just a part-time commitment, but rather it's an entire life, without break, lived toward the glory of God. And I love the following image in verse 45.

And I shall, when he's doing this, I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts. I love that image because, like sometimes when, as Christians, we think about the word precepts, God's law, God's rule, we can think of it as a restrictive thing, you know, a narrow thing.

It's restrictive. It's something that limits us, right? Constrains us. But the psalmist describes it as, when he seeks the precepts of God, he says, I shall walk in a wide place.

This is the spaciousness of obedience. There's a sense of spaciousness, of freedom, liberty that comes with obedience. It's in the same way, you know, it's only the musician that disciplines him or herself to do these tedious finger-strengthening exercises, or scales, that can later play these difficult, you know, exquisite pieces of music, with freedom and joy, right?

It's that, it's that, and in the same way, it's the, I mean, if you think of a writer, right, an author, it's, it's those who have disciplined themselves with learning the conventions of grammar and diction, and, and, and really these literary principles that can later really experiment and write freely and, and joyfully, and, and with flourish.

[6 : 30] And so it's the discipline, and that reminds me of the, of a quote that I've used before from G.K. Chesterton in his book, Orthodoxy. He comments on this paradoxical aspect of God's law.

He says, the more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.

It's the, the, the freedom to obey. It, it gives us protection, boundaries, in order, in which we can run wild. There's a spaciousness. God makes it wide.

I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts. And, and then he, and he continues his pledge in verse 46, I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame.

And that's, and it's, there's an emphasis on giving testimony earlier in verse, right, 42 and 43. He spoke of bearing witness, giving testimony to his enemies who taunt him.

[7 : 34] And now here, he's saying, even before kings, he will bear testimony, he will bear witness to God's word and he will not be ashamed. And, and this is, it's a good question to ask, do we have this kind of confidence as a psalmist that we will not be put to shame when we share, bear witness to God's word.

That even when we're before the wisest of people in the world, do we have faith that God's word will prove still wiser? Even before the best philosophers of this age, do we have confidence that God's word will prove truer?

Right? And, and even, even among the, you know, the most noble or moral people in the world, do we have confidence that God's word will be still more noble and more, more beautiful and moral and better in every way.

And, and, and the psalmist has that confidence where he says, even before kings, I know I will not be ashamed and he puts, he, he bears witness to God's word and he pledges to continue to do that.

And the reason is amazing. Verse 47, for I find my delight in your commandments which I love. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments which I love and I will meditate on your statutes.

[8 : 47] The phrase lifting up my hands, it's, it's usually, it's a kind of a gesture of prayer and when it's used in scripture, it's usually referring to God. I lift up my hands to God.

It's a way of stretching your hands out to God. But here, interestingly, that it, that's, that the state of God, it says, I will lift up my hands toward your commandments. commandments. So, because the commandments of God speak of God, reveal God, stand for God.

And, and here, and, and, and, and it's hard to miss kind of the relational and almost even romantic, right, overtones, right, which I love, right?

it's, it reminds me of the word, the English word we have, like a bibliophile, right? Someone who loves books, right? Lovers of books. And, and there's a, there's a sense which, right?

I mean, Kim's, Kim's one of them, right? Yeah, yeah. And, there's a sense in which you can really fall in love with the book, right? Like, I mean, it's, it engages, unlike, I don't know, TV shows or movies that imagine things for you.

[9 : 49] When you read a book, you have to use your own imagination. It engages you in a different way. You kind of really get immersed in the world and you get really, you can get really enamored with the characters and so there's a sense which you can really fall in love with a book and you feel like it's a relationship.

You get to know someone. But, this is true in a much profound, much more profound way with scripture because God presently speaks from his word.

It's a way in which we relate to God, hear from him and we could even pray back scripture to him. and, and so, and so, it's not inappropriate for the psalmist to say, I love God's commandments.

I delight in God's commandments. I love him and, and that's the love that we should cultivate and it's those who love God's word that bear faithful witness to it. and, and this is, it's, and that's why because he loves it, it says, he, he, and he was going to bear a faithful witness to it and we know that in the end his faith and his hope will not be disappointed because God always delivers on his promises and his deliverance ultimately is seen in, he's seen the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the, is the, is what the promise, all the promises of the Old Testament point to and in his life, death and resurrection, he, he brings the salvation that is promised and, and by, and delivering us from our sins, dying for our sins, being raised from the dead to give us new eternal resurrection life and, and now, and as people who are on that other side of, of, of, the salvation history, as people who have experienced this, have seen the fulfillment of God's promises which this psalmist was only holding out for and hoping in, we all the more should love God's word and bear witness to it.

[11 : 46] That's really the main point of this psalm.