

Psalm 119:17-24

Introduction – We’re taking Psalm 119 in stanzas and we come to the third, each verse beginning with the third letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Gimel. Every stanza is organized this way, reminding us that every Word of God is carefully chosen by Him, and instructing us that thoughtful writing, organizing, and meditating over prayer does not dampen the work of the Spirit. Each verse of Psalm 119 reflects and rejoices over some aspect of the Word of God. In this stanza, the Psalm-singer leans on the power of God in His Word against worldly enemies. Certainly, one can also see in the shadows the Passion of Christ and His prayer through this stanza.

Bounty (v17) – It is in God’s bounty that we have life, have been brought to new life, and are sustained in that life. Do you ever feel that it will take God’s grace just to persevere through this day? So did the Psalm-singer. It will take His bounteous grace to will and to do according to His good pleasure (Phil 2:13) and that is what God promises (Phil 4:19), but we learn here by example to pray for it and sing about it.

Wondrous Things (v18) – In order to live and keep His Word, we need more gospel, more good news – we must see this coming forth from His law. Those whom the world call “wise” cannot see the wondrous things in God’s Word (1 Cor 2:13-14) and this is just what Jesus intended to do (John 9:39). But the Spirit of God opens eyes (Matt 16:17) and He does so in the work of preaching (Acts 26:18). Do you ever feel as though you cannot open God’s Word to understanding? The Psalm-singer did and prayed that God would do just that. The beauty of the New Testament is its commentary of the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ, something even the angels of God are amazed over (1 Pet 1:12).

Strangers Here (v18) – Why is the Psalm-singer praying for bounteous grace and open eyes to see God and His ways? Like Christ, we who are born again in Him are not from this world. His kingdom is from heaven. And so there is this sense of being out of place in this world. We are to be in the world, but not of it; and we are not to love the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17). As pilgrims, we find ourselves in need to stand against the idols around us and follow God’s will; we need to know not only how to think but how to live. And so, we are instructed to ask for understanding and application of His commandments.

My Soul Breaks with Longing (v19) – Carnal desires can drive a man insane with passion, but we are to be instead crushed with a longing for God’s judgments, His Word, His promises, His deliverance, His presence and fellowship. In fact, if our longings are not fervently so, they will soon be choked by the corruptions of the cares and lusts of the world. In the verses that follow, we will see that the Psalm-singer does not have this desire only when things are going well. As he meditates and sings over the Word, this is his strong desire when difficulties are near.

Rebuke the Proud (v21) – In contrast to seeking God’s will in every circumstance (v17), the proud, following in the footsteps of their Parents in the Garden, seek their own ways of knowledge, defining good and evil for themselves. Pride comes from thinking too highly of oneself, either in arrogance or in self-pity. The Psalm-singer doesn’t want to fall into either trap, but instead seeks to keep his eyes fixed on God and His ways. Because they are heaven’s ways, they often look wrong down here (forgiving, turning the other cheek, loving enemies, refusing to partake in sin even when it’s “cool” or will get you ahead). God promises to humble the proud (Luke 14:11). And when we meditate on how God does and will rebuke those who stray from His commandments, it is good tonic for us to continue in His ways.

Reproach and Contempt (vv22-23) – Believers feel like strangers on earth because they do not fit in, and so “stranger” is an accurate description. But slander deals with accusations which are untrue. Because we are not of this world, the world hates us and will persecute us – in various ways throughout this age (John 15:19-20). The Psalm-singer is not declaring his perfect keeping of God’s law in 22b; he is declaring that he has not done what they are slandering him over. Even those in power had taken aim at this psalmist (and here we are seeing the shadows of the life of Christ). Whether it was the Prince of demons tempting Christ in the wilderness, or Pilate and Herod at the cross, Jesus trusted in God’s Word to vindicate His name.

Your Testimonies are My Delight (v24) – What is the testimony of David’s faithfulness? Of Abraham’s? Of Noah’s? And what is the testimony of Christ who, *“for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:1-2)”*? What do these testimonies provide for us in delight and counsel? That God turns the works of the wicked on their heads (2 Cor 2:8) and vindicates His own.

Like Watching Your Favorite Movie – No, better than that. Meditating on the Word of God, going over and over His stories, His laws, His character, His promises, changes us from the inside-out. The Psalm-singer knew that and so he composed Psalm 119, meditating over the goodness and power of God’s Word. We have the gift of the New Testament and we live on this side of the cross, where the mystery has been unveiled. The glory of the knowledge of the Lord is covering the earth as the waters cover the sea. Even more so, then, let the Word dwell in and cover you richly – for it is your life.