

Gimel  
 Psalm 119:17-24  
 ABC 5/13/18

Open your Bibles to Ps 119 as we continue our way through this 22-stanza poem about God's Word. Today we'll be looking at vss 17-24 & I want you to notice a couple of things about this passage before we read it. One is that it takes on the form of a prayer. You see it especially in vss 17-20. This is a spiritual petition with the psalmist asking God to do certain things for him. I also want you to notice that the context of this prayer is troubling & difficult times. We see this especially in vss 21-24 where he speaks of those who have scorn & contempt for him, princes that are plotting against him. He tells us in vs 19 that he feels like a stranger & we get the sense there's trouble but it's clear when you get to vss 21-24. We're going to spend most of our time on the 4 petitions we see in vss 17-20. The 1<sup>st</sup> petition is for God's favor so the psalmist can live by & keep God's Word (17). The 2<sup>nd</sup> plea is for God, by His Spirit, to open the psalmist's eyes so he could see the glories of the Word (18). The 3<sup>rd</sup> request is that even as he's living as a pilgrim in this world, that God's Word would be his guide (19). & the 4<sup>th</sup> is an announcement of being enthralled with the Word of God & his desire for God to grow his delight in the Word of God. We're going to look at those 4 petitions in the context of trouble as we study this psalm together. But before we do, let's look to God in prayer & ask for His help & blessing.

Listen to the Word of God: 17-24

Amen, & thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, & inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Troubles are nothing new. People have had trying times from the very beginning. Neither is suffering only for Christians. All people experience it to some degree. As we read in Job, **For affliction does not come from the dust, Nor does trouble sprout from the ground, For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward** (5:6-7). But if you're like me, you still get surprised when difficult times come. When trouble strikes, when tribulation comes, when trials rise, somehow I'm never expecting them. & the Word of God in general, & this psalm in particular, reminds us this is a mistake. Young people, we gather together Sunday after Sunday not to play a religious game.

We're here to have an interaction, not just from me to you & you to me, but from the living God through His Word to all of us to prepare us for the troubles we'll face in life. The truth is we'll all face difficulties & encounter disappointments. Some of these are so devastating we can't imagine living through them. Some of you have experienced those dark & trying times that break the heart & grieve the soul. So it's vital for us to understand this context if we're going to appreciate the petitions that are lifted up in this psalm. Jesus said to His disciples on the night He was betrayed, **In the world you have tribulation.** He's not being pessimistic but realistic. He's saying to His disciples & to us, **In the world you have tribulation.** You'll live with suffering & persecution. But He doesn't just leave it at that. **In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world** (Jn 16:33). It's important for us to understand this truth. As we read the Scriptures it's important for us to relate the troubles of Scripture to our troubles so we don't think the troubles of Scripture are distant & unreal & our troubles are real. If we do that it will only rob us of the comfort God intends for us to have in Him. If our hearts have been broken by a child, if our hearts have been broken by a spouse or parent or friend how must we respond? If we have trouble at work or marital or financial troubles or we're being persecuted or a wide variety of other things, we must submit that trouble to the counsel of God's Word. That's one reason He's given it to us. Don't forget the situation the psalmist seems to be in here as he writes this. All of us will face trouble. The only question is: *Will we have the peace that God intends His children to have, even in trouble?* It's out of the midst of trouble that the psalmist lifts up these requests.

### **1. Praying for Favor 17**

What does the psalmist call himself here? **Your servant.** This tells us he'd submitted himself to God's rule in his life. The psalmist asks the Lord to deal **bountifully** with him that he may live & keep the God's Word. This is a profound prayer. Repeatedly in the Psalms & elsewhere in Scripture, prayers like this indicate a desire for the Lord to give life, real life, a quality of life that is worthy of the name, a spiritual life, an abundant life that is found only in fellowship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. The psalmist is saying, *Lord, would You graciously, generously, &*

*kindly deal with Your servant so that I may have real life in the keeping of Your Word.* Think back to Adam & Eve & the serpent's temptation. To Eve & Adam he said, *If you want to have real life you've got to disobey God's Word.* But the psalmist's prayer, out of the midst of trouble in his life, is just the opposite of Satan's lie. The psalmist is saying, *Deal bountifully with me, that I may have real life in living out Your Word because I know Your Word gives life. So show me Your favor that I may live by Your Word.* He wants God to **deal bountifully** with him. He's not asking for God to give him what he deserves; he's asking the Lord to deal with him in grace. He's not pleading his merit or his worthiness; he's coming to the Lord & saying, *Lord, You're generous, so out of Your bounty give me this gift.* I want you to think about this because no matter what kind of situation you're in, if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, He has dealt **bountifully** with you. Think of it: The humblest & poorest of us possess unsearchable riches that the greatest kings & rulers of this world can't begin to comprehend. We possess unspeakable blessings. Life, real life is yours, forgiveness is yours, acceptance with God is yours, new life is yours, Christ's righteousness is yours. God is your Father, Christ is your Brother, the Holy Spirit is your Sanctifier & Comforter & Guide. All the wealth of the world isn't worth a tiny fraction of all your blessings in Christ.

Henry Lyte is a man who knew trouble. He was the 2<sup>nd</sup> son of Thomas & Anna Maria Lyte. Henry's father was described as a *ne-er do-well ... more interested in fishing & shooting than in facing up to his family responsibilities.*<sup>1</sup> Henry was frail & suffered from asthma & tuberculosis most of his life. His dad deserted the family shortly after making arrangements for his 2 oldest sons to attend a boarding school. His mother moved to London, where both she & her youngest son died. His father remarried & there wasn't a good relationship between Henry & his stepmother. While he was at boarding school his father wrote to him & said, *Henry, I think it would be better if you no longer call me 'Father,' but that you call me, 'Uncle.'* I can't imagine how devastating that would have been to Henry who was only 12 or 13. The headmaster of the school saw potential in Henry & took care of him. When Henry was in his 20's he came to know God as His Father &

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<sup>1</sup> *Henry Francis Lyte & the Story of Abide With Me*, (Manchester, England: Torch Publishing Company, 1957).

pastored a church for 23 years in a poor fishing village in Devonshire, England before his death when he was 53. But listen to what Henry Lyte says in the hymn, *Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken*.<sup>2</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> vs he talks about being *destitute, despised, forsaken*. He knew trouble. But he ends the vs with the words, *Yet how rich is my condition, God & heav'n are still my own*. He had the right perspective. In the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza, he's preaching to himself. *Take, my soul, thy full salvation; rise over sin, & fear, & care*. He wants to conquer his sins & his fears & his worries. He continues, *Joy to find in every station*. In every situation in life there's joy to find. Then he writes, *something still to do or bear*, meaning he knows God has called him to do something or to bear up under something. & then how does he encourage himself? *Think what Spirit dwells within thee*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Paraclete of God dwells in me. Think of that. Then he sings, *What a Father's smile is thine*. Knowing what Henry Lyte experienced in life with his father, that's an amazing statement. Henry knew he had a heavenly Father that loved him & would never say, *Henry, I think you need to call me 'Uncle.'* He knew he could cry, *Abba*, to his Father & his Father would always be there. He knows his Father's smile. He has the Spirit dwelling in him & he has his Father's smile. Next he says, *What a Savior died to win thee*. Think of the Savior who died to save me. & he ends the stanza with, *Child of heaven, why should you repine?* In other words, no matter the troubles of life, with God as my Father, the Holy Spirit as my comforter, & Jesus as my Savior, there's no reason to feel or express discontent or to fret about it. Henry Lyte is living the context of the passage we're looking at throughout that whole hymn. He knows the deep, hard, dark, troubles of life, but what does he look to? He looks to God & he says, *Lord, deal bountifully with me*. & then he thinks,

*Lord, You've given me Your Spirit, You've given me the smile of a Father that I haven't known in this life & You've given me a great Savior who died for me. I have no reason to mope in sackcloth & ashes when You've given me these unsearchable riches & these unspeakable blessings. You have dealt bountifully with me.*

His most well-known hymn, *Abide with Me* (#419) has many of the same themes. He sings of things like: *the darkness deepens, helpers fail & comfort flees, earth's joys grow dim, change & decay in all around I see*. He wrote this weeks before his death. But he ends each vs with phrases

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<sup>2</sup> Hymn #377 in our hymnal

like this: *Help of the helpless, O abide with me. O Thou who changest not, abide with me. Come, Friend of sinners, & thus bide with me. On to the close, O Lord, abide with me. Through cloud & sunshine, Lord, abide with me. In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.* & Henry knew that God did abide with him.

Why does the psalmist want God to deal bountifully with him? So that he **may live**, so that he might have true life, abundant life, fullness of life in God's favor. The Bible is filled with the blessings God has given you. In Rom 8:32 God says, **He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** Those all things are yours if you're in Christ. They are yours as surely as Christ is yours. Use them in the fight in the midst of trouble. That's what the psalmist is doing. *Show me Your favor so that I may live by Your word.* That's the 1<sup>st</sup> thing I want you to see.

## **2. Praying for Illumination 18**

What's the psalmist saying here? He's saying, *Lord, don't let my blindness, don't let my spiritual dullness, allow me to miss a syllable of Your Word! Don't let my dimness, my dullness, & my blindness let me miss any of Your Word!*

Howard Carter was the Egyptologist who discovered the marvelous artifacts of the tomb of King Tut in 1922. When he exposed the steps leading down to the burial chamber, Carter summoned Lord Carnarvon, the expedition's sponsor, to be present when the tomb was opened. The 2 men made their way to the tomb & had the workmen push back the last covering to the door of the entrance chamber.

Lord Carnarvon asked impatiently, *Do you see anything?*

*Yes, wonderful things,* was Carter's memorable answer.<sup>3</sup>

& wonderful they were! The most beautiful objects ever found in any ancient tomb. But they pale in comparison to the far more wonderful things to be found in Scripture by anyone when God opens his spiritually blind eyes to see them. These treasures are wonderful in themselves, wonderful because their source is in God, wonderful because of what they do in us & for us, & wonderful because they're everlasting when everything else we know is rapidly passing away.

The psalmist loved God's law. Why? Because God's law is a reflection of God's character. When

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<sup>3</sup> Boice, J. M. (2005). Psalms 107–150: An Expositional Commentary (p. 986).

he looked at the law of God he saw the person of God, the character of God, the heart of God. As he read God's Word he came face-to-face with the God he loved. He saw in the law an accurate portrait, an accurate reflection of the character of God. & he loved it because he loved him. The law of God is God's character recorded with words. It comes to us from the very heart & mind of God. Its purpose isn't 1<sup>st</sup> to tell us what we must be & what we must do. Not 1<sup>st</sup>. Its purpose is to tell us 1<sup>st</sup> who God is & what He's like. & right here the Bible confronts you & me. If we don't love the law & don't want to do the law, we don't love the God who gave the law. Do we love the law of God like the psalmist did? Do we treasure it as he treasured it? Do we meditate upon it & internalize it & live in light of it as he did? He loved the law of God because he loved the God of the law. Do we?

What does it mean to have our eyes opened? Remember Balaam, the false prophet, who wanted to curse Israel & the donkey he was riding? His donkey saw something Balaam didn't see. The donkey saw an angel ready to do away with Balaam. But Balaam's eyes were completely blind to the spiritual reality in front of him. After Balaam & the donkey have a conversation, Balaam's eyes are opened & he sees what the donkey saw. It wasn't that it wasn't there before; it was that he was blind to the spiritual perception of it (Num 22:22-35). Have you ever had that experience with the Word of God? You've read it a 100x & the truth of the passage hasn't made an impact? But on the 101<sup>st</sup> time the Lord opens your eyes & it's like you've never read it before. Or you've never seen the warning & your eyes are suddenly opened & you realize the depth of your sin. Remember the story of 2 Kings 6? When Elisha & his servant are surrounded on a mountain by their enemies? & Elisha's servant is understandably nervous. Elisha says to his servant, **Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them** (16). Elisha's servant must have looked around & said, *Uh, Elisha, are you OK? There are 2 of us & there are a lot of them!* Elisha prays, **Lord, open his eyes** (17). Suddenly the servant sees a mountain full of horses & chariots of fire all around them. His eyes were opened! That's what the psalmist is saying. *Lord, open my eyes! The words of life are here! Don't let me miss a word!* Doesn't it remind you a little bit of that encounter at night with Nicodemus & Jesus? Nicodemus is a great teacher in Israel of

the Law, but he's blind! The conversation is comical as Jesus says to him, *Unless the Holy Spirit opens your eyes, you can't understand to see the kingdom of God, you can't see the truth of His Word* (Jn 3:1-21). & Nicodemus responds, *I don't understand*. Right! Because the Holy Spirit has to open your eyes. Do you pray that you might see wonderful things in His Word? Out of the midst of trouble the psalmist knows that the thing he most needs is a word from God & that word is in God's Word & he doesn't want to miss it & neither should we. This vs combines prayer & God's Word, & we need to see how, so we can combine them this way in our lives. There are 3 quick things we learn here.

**A. There are wonderful things in the Word of God.** The word **law** is *Torah* & means instruction or teaching in this context. There are wonderful things in God's teaching to us. In fact, they're so wonderful that when you really see them, they change you profoundly & empower holiness & love & obedience (2 Cor 3:18). Which is why reading & knowing & meditating on the word of God is so crucial.

**B. No one can see these wonderful things for what they really are without God's supernatural help.** If God doesn't open our eyes, we won't see the wonder of the Word. We aren't naturally able to see spiritual beauty. Not that you don't understand the words, but you can't see the wonder, the beauty, & the glory of it.

**C. We must pray to God for supernatural illumination when we read the Bible.** Since we're helpless in ourselves to see spiritual beauty & the wonder of God in the teachings & events of the Bible without God's Spirit's illumination, we should ask Him for it. **Open my eyes.**

If you neglect what God tells you will sanctify you & make you mature & strong & holy, then you won't be mature & strong & holy. Reading & meditating on & loving the word of God is God's appointed way of overcoming sin & becoming a strong, godly, mature, loving, wise person. All of us are blind without the awakening, enlivening, softening, humbling, purifying, enlightening work of God in our lives. We'll never see the beauty of spiritual truth without God's illumination. Prayer is essential to our righteous living because it's the key to unlocking the power of God's Word in our lives. Being changed into the likeness of Jesus happens by seeing the beauty & worth &

excellence of God & His Son & their words & ways. In 2 Cor 3:18 Paul says, **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.** Beholding is becoming. This is the only way to change behavior so it honors God. We change because we've seen a superior beauty & worth & excellence. If you look into the face of Jesus & then look into some magazine or book & aren't moved by the superior beauty & worth & excellence & desirability of Christ, then you're still blinded. You need to cry out, **Open my eyes to see wonderful things out of your Word!** & your life will show it. Where your treasure is, where your desire & delight are, there will your heart be also. We're changed by seeing the glory of God in the Word of God. If God isn't more glorious to you & more compelling to you than the things of this world, you haven't seen Him. (1 Jn 3:6; 3 Jn 11). John Piper gives this example:

God opens the eyes of the blind to see the glory of God in His Word when they're looking at the Word. Suppose you wanted to see the glory of the Grand Canyon, but were blind. & suppose God said to you, *Call on me & come & pray to me & I will open your eyes to see the glory of the Grand Canyon.* Would you move from Arizona to Florida to pray? Or would you use every muscle & sense God gave you to get to the Grand Canyon & set your eyes toward what God had promised? The point is: He won't show you the glory of the Grand Canyon if you insist on living by the Everglades, no matter how much you pray.<sup>4</sup>

We must not make the mistake of thinking what we need from God's Spirit is some new information. We already have more information about God in the Bible than we can fathom or enjoy. What we need is to see with the eyes of our hearts! Any addition of information by the Spirit to what we can see of Christ in the Word wouldn't make us one bit more spiritual or pleasing to God. It isn't new information we need; it's new eyes to see what's been revealed to us in God's Word. But when you pray for eyes to see, don't think you're done. Don't assume that because you pray means you don't have to read & study & focus your thoughts on the Word of God. Don't just pray & wait, doing nothing. That doesn't cut it. If we pray to see it, but never read & study it, we'll never have our eyes opened. We must read the Word! What a privilege we have to read God's thoughts, His revealing of Himself to us. In Eph 3:3-4. Paul writes, **By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you**

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<sup>4</sup> Desiringgod.org



read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. Did you catch that? **When you read!** God willed that the greatest mysteries of life be revealed through reading. Praying can't replace reading. Praying may turn reading into seeing. But if we don't read, we will not see. The Holy Spirit is sent to glorify Jesus, & the glory of Jesus is portrayed in the Word. Therefore, read! We must study & accurately handle the Word of God, & we must pray or we won't see in the Word the one thing most needful, the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:4, 6). Yes, we must pray. We won't see wonderful things out of God's Word if he doesn't open our eyes. But praying cannot replace studying, because Paul says, *Be diligent, study, to handle the Word accurately* (2 Tim 2:15). Our approach to the Bible should be like a greedy prospector in the gold rush or a fiancée who's lost her engagement ring somewhere in the house. She ransacks the house. That is the way we seek for God in the Bible. Seek as for silver, search as for hidden treasures. Ransack the Bible for all you can find. If there are hidden treasures, act like it. If there is silver, act like it. By all means pray, but don't substitute prayer for diligent study of God's Word. Prayer is indispensable, but we also have to read & study & ransack & meditate & ponder the Word. God has ordained that the eye-opening work of His Spirit always be combined with the mind-informing work of His Word. His aim is that we see the glory of God & that we reflect the glory of God. & so He opens our eyes when we're in His Word. To put it another way, it's important that God open our eyes, but that isn't the whole story. While he was praying, the psalmist was also doing his part, which he describes as longing for God's laws (20), meditating on God's decrees (23), & delighting in God's statutes (24). If we want to see wonderful things in the Scriptures, it isn't enough for us merely to ask God to open our eyes that we might see them. We must also study the Bible carefully. The Holy Spirit is given not to make our study unnecessary but to make it effective.

### **3. Praying for Guidance 19**

The psalmist calls himself **a stranger in the earth**. There are 2 ideas in this expression. 1<sup>st</sup>, it suggests we're only passing through this world for a short while, with little time to know & live by God's Word. Therefore, we should devote ourselves to getting to know the Bible well. The vss

around this phrase seem to support this idea: **I am a stranger in the earth; therefore, do not hide your commands from me** (19) & **My soul is crushed with longing after your ordinances at all times** (20). The concern of the psalmist is with getting to know & then actually living by God's Word. 2<sup>nd</sup>, there's the idea of being out of place in this world. Believers are alienated from the world by belonging to God, whom the world doesn't know or honor. This idea seems supported by the larger context, because after speaking of his own desire to know God's commands, the poet writes of the **arrogant, the cursed, who wander from your commands** (21) & the **princes who sit & talk against** or slander him (23). The truth is, if you're trying to follow God, the world is going to treat you as an alien, because that's what you are. You can't expect to be at home in it, & if you are, it could be an indication that you really don't belong to Christ or at least are living far from him. Maybe you think that's too harsh. But Jesus expressed it in even stronger terms.

**If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you** (Jn 15:19–20).

We may not be at home in a world that doesn't know God, but we have a home in God & can rejoice in Him because He alone is fully satisfying. So the psalmist prays,

*Lord, I'm a stranger in this world; let Your Word be my guide. I'm a stranger here, Lord; I don't belong here. This isn't where my treasure is, this isn't where my home is. I don't know the way in this world because this is not my home, so I need Your Word to be my guide.*

So often we live in this life like here is all there is. We live like this is where our possessions are & where our home is. But all that is in glory, it's in the new heavens & the new earth where our possessions & home truly are. This world is not my home. Do you believe that?

#### **4. Praying for Longing 20**

This is an aspiration. It's a declaration but it's also a desire. The psalmist is saying, *Lord, I am utterly enthralled with & I yearn & ache for Your Word.* God's grace plants in us an insatiable desire for the Word of God so we can say that we don't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4). & when grace is at work in you, far from Laodicea & luke-warmness, the grace-filled believer follows hard after God, pursuing the enjoyment that only God can give, & following the way that only His Word reveals. & that enjoyment, far from

taking the edge off of that enthrallment & that desire & that delight in God's Word, only makes you yearn & ache for it more.

### **5. Warning 21**

The whole plan of salvation is intended to humble the pride of man, because it's all by God's grace, a free gift through the atoning blood of Jesus on the cross. How hateful, therefore, is mankind's proud resistance to this humbling doctrine of the cross.

### **6. Suffering 22-23**

Slander deals with accusations that are untrue. It assigns false motives to the good we may be trying to do & even charges us with evil that we haven't done. Being a stranger & alien is bad enough, but to be falsely accused when we are actually trying to live for God & do good is far worse.

### **7. Delight & Counselor 24**

The psalmist needed wisdom to know how to handle these difficult situations & he found counsel in God's Word. Instead of listening to the enemy's slander, he meditated on God's truth. That's a good way to keep your mind clean & confident in trying times (Phil 4:4-7). What is it to have God's Word as our **Counselor**? Is it not to have Himself, the only wise God, giving us advice? When our Bibles, in days of difficulty, are searched in a humble, prayerful, teachable spirit, we're as much depending upon the Lord Himself for counsel, as if we were listening to an immediate revelation from heaven. We don't need new revelation or a voice from heaven. It's enough that our Father has given us His Word as a light to our feet & a lamp to our path. Let me ask: What is the counsel of God that speaks directly to us? If we're an unawakened sinner, it warns us to turn from sin & it invites us to the Savior. If I'm a moral person, resting in a form of godliness, it shows my real condition & instructs me in the all-sufficiency of Christ & cautions me of the danger of hypocrisy. If, through God's grace, I'm a child of God, I realize I need my Father's counsel to recover from perpetual backsliding, to empower me to increased obedience, & to strengthen my confidence in the fullness of His grace & the faithfulness of His love.

Do you feel as the psalmist did about the Word of God? Do you have an appetite for it? Do you gorge yourself in it? Do you ransack it? Do you need to hear His promises? I think one reason why God's Word doesn't penetrate into our situations of trouble like we need it to isn't because of its lack of power but because our lack of pursuit of it. We don't stay with it long enough. We don't allow its principles to permeate every atom of our being & change the way we look at the trouble we're in. & the psalmist has given us a recipe for sorrowing, yet rejoicing, when facing trouble. We must live as a pilgrim in a strange land, but at the same time as one who possesses everything in Christ. May God open our eyes to our need of His Word & give us the desire to feed on it continually.