

Psalm 119:41-48

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Date: 06 October 2019

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[0 : 00] Do you read God's Word? I would imagine, I would hope that most of you would be able to answer that question in the affirmative. Do you listen to God's Word?

Well, hopefully this evening you're listening to God's Word, read and preached. Do you value God's Word? Again, I would wager and I would hope that most of us here, perhaps everybody here, would be able to answer honestly and sincerely, yes, I do value God's Word.

But I have another question for you, and one that I want us to just focus on a little bit as we consider this passage that we've read. And the question is this, do you speak God's Word? Do you speak God's Word?

You read it, you listen to it, you value it, but do you speak God's Word? And this evening, directed by this passage that we've read in Psalm 119, I want to encourage and challenge you to speak God's Word in different directions, or to put it another way, to different audiences.

Now, I'll give you the headings, and that will make clear the directions or the audiences that I'm talking about. And then we'll turn to the passage and see how there's instruction for us in these different ways.

[1 : 17] First of all, speaking God's Word to my God. I want us to think about that, about for each of us as believers, what does it involve, or what can we learn about that?

Speaking God's Word to my God. But then also, speaking God's Word to my enemies. And then another direction in which we can speak God's Word, speaking God's Word to myself.

Now, in a moment we'll turn to see where we find all this in this section. But then the final direction in which I want us to reflect is speaking God's Word to kings. In the passage, if you were paying attention, and I'm sure you were, that's the one thing that's explicitly spoken about.

David actually explicitly says and talks about speaking your statutes before kings. But I think he also speaks about these other things, perhaps less explicitly.

So let's think of each of them in turn. Speaking God's Word in these different directions. To God, to our enemies, to myself, and to kings. First of all, speaking God's Word to my God.

[2 : 25] Now really, the whole of the psalm is a prayer directed to God. That's what the psalmist is doing throughout the psalm. He is praying, he is speaking to God.

The whole psalm is a record of the psalmist speaking to God. Speaking to God is what we do as the people of God. And we can do it at any time and in any circumstance.

Even this evening, Rob, you were mentioning how there might be a situation where you simply, with your eyes open, just speak to God. And God hears his people. And so we speak to God.

That's our great privilege. Now in this section of the psalm, what does the psalmist ask for? Well, notice what it says there in verse 41. May your unfailing love come to me, Lord, your salvation according to your promise.

Now what we read there in our version of the Bible, that expression, unfailing love, translates the Hebrew word *chesed*.

[3 : 26] Sometimes translated in English as covenant love or steadfast love. And this reference to God's unfailing love is paralleled in this poem with the word salvation.

May your unfailing love come to me, Lord, your salvation. So the idea there is that the unfailing love that the psalmist is asking for and God's salvation are really one and the same thing expressed in different ways.

So really what the psalmist is saying is demonstrate your unfailing love in rescuing me, in action. It's not just some warm, fuzzy feeling that I want to experience of your love, but I want you to show your unfailing love, your covenant love, in my favor by delivering me, by rescuing me, by saving me, from whatever circumstance it was that he had in mind.

And he doesn't share that with us, which is probably best because it allows us to maybe apply it to our own particular circumstances. Now on what grounds does he speak to or ask of God in this way?

Well, he tells us, May your unfailing love come to me, Lord, your salvation according to your promise. So he's directing this request to God, this plea to God.

[4 : 41] He's speaking to God and asking Him for this according to your promise. Now, of course, this is consistent with a cry for God to show unfailing or covenant love because covenant love is grounded in God's promises to His people.

God has promised covenant faithfulness to His people. God has promised to save us. And so the psalmist is really speaking God's own words to God.

He's saying, God, you have promised this. You have promised to save us. You have promised your love to your people. And so when I ask you for it, what I'm asking for is that which you have already promised.

The psalmist is speaking God's words to God. And this is of great practical value and importance to us as God's people to get a grip of that.

When we speak to God, when we ask of God that His love be demonstrated in action on our behalf or on behalf of others, we are not asking a favor of God, but we are asking that He be good to His promises.

[5 : 57] Maybe I could put it this way and hopefully in a way that we can remember. As a child of God, you seek His favor, but not His favors.

You know, when I ask somebody for a favor, I acknowledge that there is the prerogative on the part of the one I am asking to say no. It's a favor.

Could you help me? Would you be able to do this for me? If you're able to. You know, sometimes I send emails and ask somebody to help out in some way. And I tend to be very cautious about this.

And maybe I should be a bit more kind of gung-ho. But I tend to do it along these lines. You know, we're looking for help in this way. Maybe you could help. If you can't, no worries. I'm asking for a favor.

I can't demand it of them. But when we go to God and ask for His salvation, for His unfailing love, we're asking for that which He has promised to give us.

[6 : 52] We're not asking for a favor. We're asking that our God demonstrate Himself to be act as who He is, our Father in heaven who has promised to save and to answer His people when they call to Him.

And when we pray in that way, what we're really doing is praying God's Word to God. We're saying, God, this is what you say. This is what you say in the Bible about your promises. Well, I'm claiming those promises.

I'm taking those promises and I want to direct them to you and ask that you be true to your promises, which, of course, He always is. So what I would urge you to do, what I would encourage you to do this evening, this first direction in which you can speak, speak to God and speak God's Word to God.

Know and claim God's promises. And when you do speak to God, seek to cultivate a conversation with God that is Scripture-saturated, because that kind of conversation is the conversation that God will listen and respond to.

So that's the first direction. The second direction that I want to reflect on or draw out from this section of the psalm is speaking God's Word to my enemies. And that's really what the psalmist goes on to mention in verse 42.

[8 : 10] We'll just read from verse 41. And so it's clear from what the psalmist says that this call for salvation is because the psalmist is faced with enemies or those who oppose him, those who are taunting him, to use the very language that he employs.

Now, this should be something that, as believers, we are familiar with. There will be those who taunt us, who mock us, who oppose us, perhaps even who despise us, because we love Jesus and because we try and live lives of obedience to Jesus.

We fall short in so many ways, but if that is indeed what we're trying to do, if that is the life that we are seeking to live, that will bring opposition of one kind or another.

And it has ever been so. Jesus himself experienced what it was to be mocked, to be taunted by those who opposed him, by those who hated him.

Perhaps you're taunted or mocked because you refuse to lie or bend the truth at work, and that's what's expected of you, and not to do so goes against your interests or what is required of you.

[9 : 32] But you say, no, I'm not going to do that. And people oppose you because of that. Because perhaps you are committed to respecting the boundaries that God has placed around the gift of sex.

And as a young person, you say, well, no, I want to respect what God says in this matter. And that is a source of perhaps bemusement, but perhaps more than bemusement, perhaps mockery and insults and being put to one side.

Or perhaps there are people around you who think it's crazy because you dedicate your time and resources to serving God for seemingly little return. You know, I wonder, I don't know, but I wonder if the many street pastors in Britain, if there aren't those around them, are thinking, what are these guys doing?

Weekend, 10 at night to 4 in the morning. And they don't even get paid. I wonder if some people, some people admire it, but some people probably think they've lost the place. Like, why would you do that?

What kind of crazy religion is it that you follow that would ask you or require you to do that? How are we to respond to those who taunt us?

[10 : 41] Well, we are to speak God's word to them. This is the psalmist's concern. He's asking God, save me, that I might answer anyone who taunts me.

The implication seems to be that this is a verbal response. Perhaps not only a verbal response, but certainly a verbal response. Of course, it's also true that our answer to those who taunt us must be and will also be the lives that we live, lives that testify to the love and salvation of God.

That in itself can be a powerful answer to those who taunt us. So speaking God's word to God, speaking God's word to our enemies or to those who oppose us in one way or another.

But then thirdly, speaking God's word to myself or to ourselves. Verses 43 to 45. Let's just read those verses. Never take your word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.

I will always obey your law forever and ever. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. Now, verse 43 begins with an intriguing request of God.

[11 : 51] Never take your word of truth from my mouth. That seems a strange thing to ask of God. Why would God want to do that? Why would God contemplate taking his word of truth from the mouth of his son or daughter?

But what is it that the psalmist here is actually asking for? I think what the psalmist is asking for goes along these lines. I think the psalmist is probably thinking of the quiet murmuring of this word during meditation and desires that that word will never be removed.

You know, those occasions when we can speak God's word to ourselves as we read God's word, as we reflect on God's word, as we look to apply God's word to our own lives and circumstances.

And that word is on our mouth and we're speaking it to ourselves. And that is a good practice for us to have as believers, to speak God's word to ourselves.

Far from being a sign of madness, it's the surest sign of sanity. I have the habit, and those who know me or who even just observe me will know this is true, and my family members especially will know this is true, that I speak to myself a lot.

[13 : 08] I was walking down from the free church offices in Edinburgh on the mound down to the train station one time, and I was having a grand conversation with myself as I made my way down to the train station.

And my very grand conversation was interrupted by somebody on the other side of the street. Some of you know the layout of Edinburgh can picture that road that takes you down from the mound to the train station.

And he shouted over to me and he says, that's a great conversation you're having, big man. Now, I don't think I consider myself a particularly big man, but that's how he addressed me. It was jovial.

It was friendly. You know, he wasn't mocking me. But he kind of, he was startled and I kind of looked over and I said, oh, yeah, it's the only way I can get any intelligent conversation. So, now, there I just, when I speak to myself, I'm just speaking about just life and about holiday plans and about what I'm going to eat, like some really trivial stuff.

But what we're talking about here is speaking to ourselves God's Word, directing God's Word to ourselves as we read it and as we seek to listen to what God is saying and we take that Word and we speak it to ourselves.

[14 : 25] I would encourage you to do that. Encourage yourself with God's Word. Challenge yourself with God's Word. Rebuke yourself with God's Word. And notice three aspects of this, speaking God's Word to ourselves or having God's Word ever in our mouths that we see in what follows in the psalm.

First of all, this having God's Word in our mouths is grounded in our hope in God's Word. You see, there in the second half of verse 43, the psalmist gives the reason why he wants God's Word to ever be in his mouth.

For I have put my hope in your laws. His hope is in God's Word. He trusts in God's Word, in the author of this Word. And so for that reason, he wants that Word ever to be in his mouth.

But it's also accompanied by a commitment to obeying God's Word or God's law. Verse 44, I will always obey your law forever and ever. And so it's necessary for your Word to be in my mouth, for me to be ever reminding myself of what it is that I am called to do and the laws that I am to obey in gratitude to God and to the glory of God.

But there's also another aspect here which is very striking, that having God's Word in our mouth results in being liberated by God's Word.

[15 : 44] Notice this very striking language in verse 45. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. I will walk about in freedom.

The phrase there translated in English, walk about in freedom, translates the Hebrew, walk in wide places. To walk in obedience to God is to walk in freedom.

It is to walk in wide places. Now that is the opposite of many who look on from the outside, imagine the Christian life to be. They say, oh, the Christian life, I could never do that. It's so restrictive.

There's so many rules. I want to be free. And when the psalmist says, well, this is where you find freedom. It's in obeying God. It's in living life as God intended that we are freed and liberated.

It is to walk in wide places. That picture, that visual picture of comparing the freedom that there is in Christ to walking in wide places is very vivid, isn't it?

[16 : 45] What came to my mind when I read that was the opposite. We were in India in January with Martha. We were visiting a friend who was wonderfully converted in Aberdeen many years ago and baptized here in Bon Accord.

And he was hosting us on our visit. And on one occasion, Anil, some of you will have known Anil. This was some time back. He took us into the city center of Delhi. Now, Delhi city center, I imagine at the best of times, is pretty chaotic.

But on this occasion, it was particularly so because there was road works going on and pavements had been closed. And the actual space that there was to move from A to B was so restricted.

And though I've traveled a fair bit, I really felt quite frightened because I was so hemmed in. There were no wide spaces. It was all a crush. And you were just being taken by the crowd.

And you couldn't turn to the left or the right. You were just being carried along in this mass of heaving humanity. And it was most disturbing, really.

[17 : 45] Certainly for me, maybe if somebody was used to it, it would have been different. I was thinking of that as I was thinking of the contrast here of a life in Christ being walking in wide places.

You know, a life in captivity to sin is a little bit like that walking in the city center of Delhi where you've got no actual freedom to go the way you choose. You're being taken along by the crowd.

You're going in the way that others determine for you. It's not freedom. It's bondage. And yet the freedom that the psalmist has experienced is a freedom that accompanies obedience to God.

Not doing his own thing, but doing God's thing. And that he compares to walking in wide places. I walk about in freedom. This is what God calls us to.

To life and life and freedom and abundance. A full life in obedience to him. So speak God's word to yourself. But the final thing I want us to notice here is another direction in which we are to speak or another audience that we are to speak to.

[18 : 54] And it's speaking God's word to kings. In verse 46 we read, I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame. For I delight in your commands because I love them.

I reach out for your commands which I love that I may meditate on your decrees. Now what is this about? What is the psalmist talking about here when he speaks about speaking of God's word, God's statutes before kings?

Let me suggest one way of understanding this which I think does justice to the flow of this section of the psalm. The psalmist here is, we could say, in mission mode.

Speaking God's word to God and speaking God's word to ourselves must result in speaking God's word to others. And not just as we respond to those who taunt us, though that is also true as we find in the psalm, but as we speak to others of the glory of God and of the loveliness of Christ, even to kings.

That even kings would be our audience as we speak and direct God's word to them. The reference to kings perhaps points to the confidence that we should have speaking God's word in any and every circumstance.

[20 : 10] Now, you may not have the opportunity to speak God's word to a king. You may, you may not. But the picture of being able to do so, even to a king, is really telling us that whoever the person is, whatever position they occupy, however important they may seem, however daunting the prospect might be of speaking God's word to them, that is what you can do.

You can speak God's word to kings. That's what the psalmist desires to do. He's spoken to God. God has answered him. He's spoken to himself and urged him, and now the time has come.

It's time to speak to kings. It's time to speak to others. We ought not to be intimidated by the power or status or education of those God places in our path to speak to.

The word that we have been given can hold its own in any company. You may feel that you can't hold your own in any company or any circumstance, but the word that you have been given can hold its own in any company.

And the psalmist knows he will not be put to shame. I will speak your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame. You know, maybe there was that concern on his part, but what if this all goes wrong?

[21 : 30] What if I'm humiliated? What if I'm rejected? What if I'm mocked? What if I'm thrown out of the throne room of the king? But I will not be put to shame.

Even if these things happen, I will not be put to shame. Is it true for you? I'm sure it will be. For many of us, it's true that we sometimes fear precisely that.

We're afraid of being embarrassed or being ashamed or being mocked or being ignored. And so we keep quiet what the psalmist says to us.

And we hear what he was determined to do and we would join with him. I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame. Why does the psalmist want to speak to kings?

What is his motivation? Well, his delight in and love for God's word, which is evidence of a delight in and love for God himself. Verse 47, For I delight in your commands because I love them.

[22 : 27] I reach out for your commands. The language there is of raising up my hands to your commands, which I love. It's really quite striking because the language that the psalmist employs is really almost daring because it almost gives the impression of the psalmist worshiping God's word.

Of course, we don't worship God's word. We worship God. But he so identifies God's word with the author that he uses language that almost approximates to worship, but in a fitting way.

Why does he want to do this? Because of the delight that he experiences in God's word, the love that he has for the word of God and the God of the word.

And so he reaches out for God's command. So, to recap, and let's think about this week that has begun. I don't know what the week holds for you, but I would encourage you, I would urge you, that in this week, you would speak in these different directions.

Speak God's word to God. When you come to God on the basis of his promises, when you come to God recognizing your status as a son or daughter of God, you're not asking God for favors.

[23 : 36] You're not begging of God. We don't beg of God. We are his children. We come and humbly and gratefully ask for that which he has promised and he delights to give us.

So, speak God's word to God. Speak God's word to your enemies or to those, perhaps you might not consider them your enemies, but those who oppose you, those who marginalize you, perhaps mock you in one way or another, that God would give you opportunity to do so clearly and winsomely.

Speak God's word to yourself. As you read God's word, as you meditate on God's word, challenge yourself, encourage yourself, rebuke yourself with God's word.

And yes, even speak God's word to kings or whoever it is that God places in your path. Do so confidently, do so humbly, do so with the assurance that you will not be put to shame.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the Bible. We thank you that we can read it and be built up by it and be instructed in it.

[24 : 45] And we pray that we would be those who speak at your word. We do thank you that we come to a God who is our Father in heaven. You are our covenant God. And we come to you on the grounds of the many promises that you have made to us as your children.

And we thank you that we come not in the hope that you might maybe perhaps grant to us your unfailing love or your salvation. But rather we come knowing that it is your delight to grant to us and to demonstrate to us your unfailing love.

That is what we receive as your children. We pray that if it is the case for some of us here this evening that we are being mocked or taunted or opposed because of our faithfulness to you that you would give us courage and grace but also that you might give us an answer to those who speak to us.

An answer that is grounded in confidence in you but also in love for those who oppose us. Help us to meditate on your word to speak your word to ourselves.

And we do pray also that even in the course of this week you would open doors of opportunity and that we would see them opening and that we would take them and speak your word to others. And to kings, to friends, to colleagues, whoever it is you might place in our path.

[26 : 04] And we ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.