

October 20, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 20 | Psalm 119:145-152 | Qoph

Today, we move on to the nineteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Qoph. <Insert Picture>

This stanza is filled with a smattering of paired verses that complement each other nicely. First, the Psalmist contrasts different "calls" we make when crying out to God. He then moves to expound on the various times of his devotions. And then, to close out these pairings, he observes how the closer his enemies get to him, the nearer his God appears to be.

READ: Psalm 119:145-152 (ESV)

Qoph

¹⁴⁵ With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord! I will keep your statutes.

¹⁴⁶ I call to you; save me, that I may observe your testimonies.

¹⁴⁷ I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words.

¹⁴⁸ My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.

¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice according to your steadfast love; O Lord, according to your justice give me life.

¹⁵⁰ They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose; they are far from your law.

¹⁵¹ But you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true.

¹⁵² Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever.

What are the principles the Psalmist is trying to instill in this nineteenth stanza?

Vs. 145 Rather than some half-hearted whisper, our sojourner is shouting for God to "answer" him. And, to do so, he has marshaled his entire being ("whole heart") in this "cry" (*kaw-raw*) to the Lord. This is not unlike David's testimony about how God answered his own call: "In my distress, I called upon the Lord; to my God, I called. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears." (2 Sam. 22:7) Interestingly, these words only come after the Lord had ended David's conflict with Saul (cf. Psalm 18). David goes on to describe what God's "answer" looked like by saying the earth "reeled and rocked" and how the foundations of heaven itself "trembled." One

cannot help but assume when the Psalmist looked for an answer, he might've been hoping for something similar. After all, the suffering that our sojourner has experienced has been a direct result of his allegiance to God. Yet, even before getting an answer, our wanderer reaffirms his obedience when he says that he "will keep" God's word ("statues"). The Psalmist's service is not on the line. He will be as faithful as he's always been. Submissiveness is the prize. God responding to his request is the bonus.

Vs. 146 Not only does the Psalmist reiterate his commitment to "observe" God's law ("testimonies"), but he also reuses the same Hebrew term he used in verse 145, *kaw-raw'* ("call"). And while this word is common throughout the Bible (735x's), it only shows up in these two verses in all of Psalm 119. Not only does this make verses 145 and 146 a pair, but they are also identical save for one major difference: before, the Psalmist was looking for God to "answer" him; whereas, here, our sojourner is asking for God to "save" him. This is the third of such requests in this chapter (cf. vs. 94, 117; and 153, though a different Hebrew term is used, the concepts is the same). And this implies that the "answer" our sojourner was looking for in verse 145 was deliverance from some hardship, a common request found throughout Scripture. For instance, in Moses' writings about how the Israelites were to engage in warfare, he told them not to be intimidated by chariots—i.e., advanced military weaponry—or even about being outnumbered because "the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you." (Deut. 20:4 NKJV) Later, a lone shepherd boy faced off against a nine-foot-nine-inch tall giant and said, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands." (1 Sam. 17:45-47) Like David and Moses before him, our wanderer knows that rescue is the purview of God alone. The largest and most sophisticated military on the planet, whose

prowess on the battlefield is uncontested, cannot inhibit the Lord from saving those he wants to save.

Vs. 147 Long before the sun rises (“before dawn”), the Psalmist is out of bed and on his knees asking (“cry”) God to “help” him. Contrary to what many doctors would advise, sleep is not nearly as important as spending time reading the Scriptures and praying. Daily devotion to God garners a “hope” in God’s word, like daily watering a plant ensures that it will grow. Endeavoring to get a full eight hours of sleep is admirable, but devotions are the only thing that will truly sustain you throughout the day. Yes. Sleep is as important to us as eating. But too much of a good thing can become a hindrance to our spiritual growth (cf. Pro. 6:6-11). How many of us would’ve avoided trouble if, instead of hitting that snooze button, we got up, got dressed, and got on our knees? The Christian who attacks the day by diving first into God’s word is far better equipped to handle the challenges of the day than one who simply got more sleep. Or, as Michael Hyatt puts it, the best time to slay one’s dragons is before breakfast.¹ Lethargy—a lack of energy and enthusiasm—is the greatest enemy to personal development. Still, it is easily overcome by those who care more about getting more Bible than they do about getting more sleep.

Vs. 148 In the OT, there were three watches in the night: the beginning of watches (sunset to 10PM - Lam. 2:19), the middle watch (10PM to 2AM - Judg. 7:19), and the morning watch (2AM to sunrise - Ex. 14:24). Thus, when the Psalmist says that his “eyes” are opened before the “watches of the night,” he means that, rather than go to sleep, he’s wide “awake” studying God’s word (“promise”). While the masses are nestled in their beds dreamily mumbling to themselves, our wanderer is deliberately murmuring (“meditate”) Scripture to himself. Just as verses 145 and 146 were paired together, so too are verses 147 and 148. Together, these verses strike a chord that echoes the very same melody of Psalm 1:1-2, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night.” Though followers of God

¹ Hyatt, Michael, “Slay Your Dragons Before Breakfast: 3 Disciplines for Achieving Daily Victory,” July 2, 2012, *Michael Hyatt & Co.*, <https://michaelhyatt.com/slay-your-dragons-before-breakfast/>, [accessed, October 20, 2021].

were all different, it seems at least one thing they all have in common is that they read their Bibles after they get up and read their Bibles before they go to sleep. Some, like Daniel, even took time to be with God every morning, noon, and night (cf. Dan. 6:10). As much as the stomach needs food, the throat needs water, and the mind needs sleep, the soul of man needs God. Whenever we feel like we've grown spiritually anemic, it is likely because we haven't spent time with our Lord.

- Vs. 149 This is now the sixth time (cf. vs. 41, 64, 76, 88, 124) that the Psalmist has mentioned God's *khesēd* ("steadfast love"). And our singer/songwriter appeals to the Lord's loyal love in order to get God to listen ("hear") to his "voice." After all, there is no greater basis for our petitions than God's love for us. As Paul put it, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) If God gave us Jesus, would he not also want to listen to our prayers? What's more, the Psalmist not only wants God to listen, he wants God to give him "life" per the Lord's *mish-pawt'* ("justice"). It is only when God's judgments are upheld that life can flourish. And our wanderer is not shy concerning his duty. While he is far from perfect, he knows that the results will mean vitality, not death, whenever God adjudicates his situation.
- Vs. 150 As the Psalmist is prone to do, he returns to the topic of his enemies. Here, we're told that they "persecute" our sojourner with some "evil purpose." Yet, there is a contrast present in this line as the more that these nefarious actors "draw near" to our wanderer, the farther they get from God's "law." Schemers are as far from the principles of Scripture as the east is from the west. In pursuing agendas that seek the harm of the Psalmist, they have juxtaposed themselves against God.
- Vs. 151 Like the verse pairings before, this verse couples nicely with that of 150. Though the Psalmist's enemies draw near, so too does God draw near to the Psalmist. This fact puts his circumstance in an entirely different light giving perspective on the whole ordeal.² Being surrounded by adversaries is never pleasant. But a situation like that becomes far more bearable when we realize that our divine Advocate stands by as well (cf. 1 Jn 2:1). After all, as

² Kidner, Derek, *Psalms 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 464.

Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) Yet, it is in such a moment where the Psalmist is surrounded by both friend and foe that he proclaims, "your commandments are true." It is in the midst of trial and tribulation that the truths of God's word reveal themselves in our lives. Stressful times not only show us where we need improvement, but they also uncover where we've laid a good foundation. Given enough time, the hope is that we purge the unnecessary fluff from our lives with each new hurdle we overcome until only the principles of God's word remain.

Vs. 152 As mentioned before, Psalmist had probably lived a long life by the time he wrote this chapter (cf. vs. 123). The odds that a novice or an adolescent could craft such a masterpiece as Psalm 119 are long indeed. Thus, when he says, "long have I known," our wanderer is looking back over the course of his own life. Decades have passed, and though he is not the young man that he once was, the "testimonies" of God's word are as valid and secure at the end of his journey as they were at the beginning. They will, in fact, long outlive him and be staples in this world "forever." Old age has given him a perspective. He reasons that what has been proven to be true over many years will still prove itself true over many more years. If given the gift of foresight, our Psalmist would peer into the coming millennia, and "however far he looks into the future it [the Scriptures] will always be true."³

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: the most critical part of my day is the part where I spend time with God. Too often, I gloss over it. Whenever that happens, I'm literally sabotaging my own day with my own hand. The more I give myself to God's instruction through his word, the better I will be emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

³ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 215

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: