

Fainting Hearts Cry Out

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 September 2024

Preacher: Mark Aikins

- [0 : 00] This third and final lesson in Psalm 119, I've decided to just briefly cover not just one stanza of the psalm, but three consecutive stanzas.
- And hopefully we will see a pattern emerging from these three. We'll start with stanza kaf, which is stanza 11, if you want to look that up.
- And we're going to go through K, L, and M in the Hebrew alphabet. Kaf, Lamed, and Mem. As we look into these, we're going to see each one has a different tone, and it's tracing the thoughts and emotions of the psalmist as he goes from fainting to trusting and then to testifying.
- King David's magnificent poem, Psalm 119, exalts his God again and again and again for being true to his word.
- David's confident hope is focused on the word of God because his personal trust is in the God of the word. The covenant God of Israel, Yahweh, Jehovah, is unlike any other God this world can offer.
- [1 : 33] He, for one thing, truly exists. He's not a made-up God, and he's always been. He created all things by the word of his almighty power.
- And he rules over everything that he's created and everyone in his creation. How does he rule? He rules in love and kindness and compassion, fulfilling the physical needs of all people, all creatures.
- And he has that faithful covenant love for his own people, that he's loved from the foundation of the world and sent his one and only son to save lost sinners.
- Well, let's look at this first stanza, stanza kaf. And I've titled this, The Fainting Heart Cries Out to God in a Time of Great Persecution.
- And again, this is the New King James translation. My soul faints for your salvation, but I hope in your word. My eyes fail from searching your word, saying, When will you comfort me?
- [2 : 53] For I have become like a wineskin in smoke. Yet I do not forget your statutes. How many are the days of your servant? When will you execute judgment on those who persecute me?
- The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to your law. All your commandments are faithful. They persecute me wrongly. Help me.
- They almost make an end of me on earth, but I did not forsake your precepts. Revive me. Revive me. Revive me. According to your loving kindness, so that I may keep the testimony of your mouth.
- This 11th stanza of Psalm 119 finds the writer in a time of intense turmoil. He's either going through it as he writes this, or he's looking back on a time of intense persecution.
- And he's crying out to God for relief from his enemies. If you look back in stanza 10, David was hoping there that his testimony before others would be blameless, and that he need not be ashamed before them.

[4 : 14] Remember the blessed ones that he hoped to be like. He wants to be blameless in their eyes. He wants the proud ones, or the insolent ones, or telling lies about him to be put to shame instead.

And he begged for Yahweh's merciful kindness and tender mercies to comfort him during his persecution, and for his fellow believers to support him, because they believed God's testimonies rather than the lies his enemy was telling.

Well, in the 11th stanza, each verse beginning with kaf, the K letter, it begins with the Hebrew word faints.

That's the first word in Hebrew. Seemingly, the situation referred to in that previous stanza has not gotten any better. Rather, it's intensified, it's grown worse to the point where David's soul is feeling fate, ready to give out within him, about to keel over and lose consciousness.

Fates for your salvation, my soul, is the order that the Hebrew words come in. Just like in the previous stanza, we hear David complain about the proud and those who persecute him wrongfully.

[5 : 46] And in this stanza, the cries are intensified. Coming from his mouth, they're far more desperate. My soul faints. When will you comfort me?

They've dug pits for me. Help me. They almost make an end of me on earth. So we read here that the ones David prayed would be put to shame.

We're still aiming their persecution at him wrongfully. And it seemed to the beleaguered king that his God was a no-show in this picture.

Somehow it deserted him. Have you ever felt like that? That God is far off? I've felt like that many times.

And I needed God to come with fresh assurance in my life. And I imagine the most disturbing thing for David in this stanza was that he felt in himself that he was doing everything right.

[6 : 51] Look at it together. I hope in your word. My eyes fail from searching your word. I do not forget your statutes. I did not forsake your precepts.

I want to keep the testimony of your mouth. So overall, David is coming to the Lord with this question that he'd already asked in Psalm 22.

22.1 My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? Lord, they are the ones you should be forsaking.

Not me. Your humble, faithful servant. Lord, what is wrong with this picture? David is asking in this psalm. So verse 81.

My soul faints for your salvation. He begins. But I hope in your word. His cry to the Lord is becoming more desperate. Here, David speaks of his soul fainting.

[7 : 55] His eyes failing. Feeling like a shriveled up wineskin. And he calls on God for immediate salvation.

He's looking for physical, temporal relief from these enemies. Right now. Lord, I'm barely holding on.

Things are growing fuzzy. I'm about to faint. I continue to put my hope in your word. But please, save me now. Now, many times we come to that point where we're desperate to hear from the Lord.

Verse 82 flows out of that cry. My eyes fail from searching your word. Saying, when will you comfort me?

You'll notice that the words from searching are supplied by the translator. They don't appear in the Hebrew. Hebrew. They're trying to make sense of the Hebrew.

- [8 : 58] My eyes fail your word. We sometimes think about the Bible like it's like a magic charm. A magic book. Like in Aladdin's lamp. You know, we can just open it up and find a verse and it's going to solve our problems. Some kind of mystical power in the book. We have to remember that it is God himself who gave us that book. Not simply to find helpful formulas for our situations in life, but to bring us to him. To bring us to God himself. We actually fail the word when we substitute the Bible itself for the God who gave it. And there are so many people who have memorized scripture. And they know it backward and forward. They even teach it. But a lot of those people don't know the author.
- [10 : 07] They don't have that personal kinship, that relationship, that love that David had. How many are relying on their head knowledge of the Bible without really knowing him? David hoped in God's word because he knew and trusted its author. God had revealed himself to David through the word. And David trusted in the God of the word. Verse 83. For I have become like a wineskin in smoke. Yet I do not forsake your statutes. The word for refers back to David's question. When will you comfort me? And gives a reason for that request. I need your comfort, Lord, because I become like a wineskin in smoke. You know, that's the only place in the scripture or in any other written record that Bible scholars have been able to find where that simile is used.
- [11 : 23] Become like a wineskin in smoke. And I looked and looked for different interpretations of that. When will you comfort me? I've become like a wineskin in smoke. Lord, I've been a trusted container of your wine, your spirit. For many years. But I feel like I'm old and cracked and worn out. I'm hanging up in the smoke. Has your spirit departed from me? Am I on my own? How long, O Lord? Is a very common expression in the Psalms. I looked for it, found at least seven places. Where that is mentioned in the book of Psalms. How long will you do this? Or how long will you wait? It's an oft-repeated theme. Well, you know, it's natural and it's normal for us to wonder at the ways of the Lord.
- [12 : 30] A God whose thousand years are like a day to Him. And a day is like a thousand years. We can't fathom that. We live in a world, in a realm that's measured by the passage of time. When pleasant things happen, we say that time what? Flies. But when we're a wineskin hanging in the smoke, time creeps along. Okay? It can't go fast enough. David says, how many are the days of your servant? How long do I have to wait? How many days do I have to put up with this? He's waiting for Yahweh to step up and judge his persecutors and asks, how long? And just like Job, David doesn't receive a direct answer to this. It appears that this time of testing has been sent for some unknown purpose in his life.
- [13 : 40] For purposes. If you look ahead to verse 88. The word revive there. Revive me according to your loving kindness so that I may keep the testimony of your mouth. The word revive is merely the Hebrew word for life. David is saying, life me.

According to your chesed. According to your loving kindness. Your covenant love. Lord, we're in this relationship together.

I need you to give me life. I feel like I'm dying. I feel like I'm fainting. Give me life so I may continue to treasure your sworn testimonies to me.

Your testimonies are somehow losing their value as I'm waiting. I need you to give me an answer to my prayer so that I can go on treasuring those testimonies.

[14 : 51] How long, oh Lord? God's answer to King David might be along the lines of, I allow your enemies to go on in their evil to show my patience and my goodness even towards them.

Giving them opportunities to repent. You know, many of those who persecute Christians are converted when they witness the way Christians put up and remain steadfast in their faith.

Even when they're being persecuted and mistreated. When God puts his children's faith to the test. It's not only for their benefit.

So that they can grow. But it's to prove to a watching universe. That our hope in God is a living hope.

Not just a theoretical one. Not just a theoretical one. But God allows even his foes time to turn back. Turn from their evil.

[16 : 01] Often they use that time just to save up more wrath. And on the day of judgment, that will glorify God. As he gives his wrath to those who refuse to turn.

But that could be a reason why God is making David wait. Maybe some of David's opponents are not beyond hope.

Maybe they will turn toward the Lord as he gives them the time to repent. Pharaoh, after all, was given ten chances to repent.

When God sent those plagues on Egypt. Of course, Pharaoh hardened his heart. And finally, God allowed him to harden his heart.

Because he turned away from those opportunities. But now let's go on to stanza 12. And we'll see David turning a corner.

[17 : 03] And sounding much stronger in his faith. Here is stanza Lamed. In the New King James. Verse 89.

Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You establish the earth and it abides.

They continue this day according to your ordinances. For all are your servants. Unless your law had been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

I will never forget your precepts. I will never forget your precepts. For by them you have given me life. I am yours. Save me. For I have sought your precepts.

The wicked wait for me to destroy me. But I will consider your testimonies. I have seen the consummation of all perfection. But your commandment is exceedingly broad.

[18 : 03] The Hebrew word Lamed can mean either teach or learn. Teach or learn. And the way the letter Lamed is written combines two other Hebrew letters.

One reaching up toward heaven. And one reaching down to the earth. To the Jewish mind, true learning and wisdom must originate with God.

And then be brought down into the practical life of people here on earth. To teach, therefore, a person must first learn what God has to say.

And in his troubles and afflictions throughout this psalm, David has cried out again and again of his trust in the precepts and testimonies of God.

He turns to them again and again. We looked at the king's darkest time. Stanza 11.

[19 : 14] His time of struggle, restless waiting, in which he felt like a wineskin in the smoke, hung out to dry and to become parched and cracked and brittle, even as the Lord seemed to have abandoned him.

But the tone of this stanza is so different. There's a renewed confidence in the word, in the works, and in the faithfulness of Yahweh his God.

He cries out, they persecute me wrongfully. Help me. That was stanza 11. But in stanza 12, he again cries out, but with an assurance that, I am yours.

Save me. Seems to have turned a corner from worrying about what and who he was and who his enemies were.

And he's now thinking about whose he is. Who he belongs to. I am yours. Save me. Well, the letter Lamed is the first sound in the Hebrew words forever, and the word ever, and the word never.

[20 : 28] These are all such all-encompassing words, and they season the thoughts of this stanza in a remarkable way. In the last stanza, David was wasting away spiritually in a dismal time that felt like forever.

He cried out, how long? This feels unending. But here, in verse 89, he writes, forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven.

We tend to think of forever in very limited terms. Someone in front of us in the grocery line is taking too long with their check or their cash or looking for their credit card, and we think, oh, they're taking forever.

But we worship a God who is an eternal God, whose words stand forever in heaven.

Many rulers throughout history, like Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar or Darius, would give pronouncements and then assume that their laws could never be changed or altered.

[21 : 48] None of their laws are now in force. Few are even remembered. But God's words, they stand firm. There's no court of appeal beyond his seat of absolute authority.

No one needed to advise him before he spoke his word, and no one could ever challenge it once it left his holy mouth. Forever, oh Lord, your word stands firm in heaven.

No wonder that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house, where?

On the rock. Those who ignore or disobey the words of Christ are building their lives on the sands of mere human wisdom.

With his all-powerful word, David's God brought the entire creation into being. This is in verse 90. And not just for a day, the miracle of the original creation would certainly have proven God's power beyond question.

[23 : 03] But isn't it the faithfulness of the Lord that causes him to maintain the creation's existence to all generations?

Your word stands firm in heaven and you've established the earth and it abides. So heaven and earth are established by the word of the Lord.

verse 91 continues this thought. They continue this day according to your ordinances for all are your servants. They refers to both heaven and earth.

In other words, all the creation that God spoke into being by the sheer force of his word. Everything in heaven and earth were created and are sustained to be his servants.

To serve his purposes. Job declared that no purpose of yours can be what? Thwarted. God ordained it.

[24 : 10] It must needs come to pass. Even evil people like Joseph's jealous brothers who sold him into slavery or even Judas who sold his master for 30 pieces of silver.

Even those evil people were allowed to do their evil for the purposes that God had established. Everything, every person, every good plan, every evil plan, nothing exists or can ever happen outside the sovereign purposes of God.

Let's read verses 92 and 93 again. Unless your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.

I will never forget your precepts for by them you have given me life. David asked for life in that 11th stanza.

Life me according to your unfailing love, your hesed. And through the word, God answered his prayer.

[25 : 25] What does it say in John 6 63? The spirit gives life. The flesh profits nothing. It is the spirit who gives life.

Jesus was talking to people who were leaving him because his words were too hard to bear, hard to hear. They didn't want to go there.

And he said, my words give life. The spirit gives life. So this is not mere fatalism.

It should be reassuring to us that God has unchangeably decreed whatever comes to pass. That should comfort us. It's not fatalism or as Doris Day put it.

Que sera, sera. Whatever will be will be. Rather, our song should be what e'er my God ordains is right. That assurance can only be ours through the saving work of Christ.

[26 : 34] As he changes our hearts, we come to him for assurance that all is well. The coming Savior of David's day and the risen Savior of our own day assures us that we can turn that corner from doubt and despair and return to contentment and trust as it is in this stanza.

Because we remember whose we are, who we belong to. David remembered, I am yours, save me. it's no longer a cry out of a fainting soul, but a confident cry of a soul possessing God's life everlasting.

Verse 95 says, the wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider your enemies. Remember how he was obsessed with what his enemies were doing in the last stanza?

Well, here, he just kind of brushes them off like they're a pesky fly. Yes, they wait to destroy me, but so what? So what?

I will consider your testimonies. David finishes his encouraging stanza by telling of another thing he's seen.

[28 : 06] I have seen the consummation of all perfection. but your commandment is exceedingly broad. This was a wonderful revelation studying this verse.

The word consummation simply means the ending, the extent of all perfection that I can see. I've seen the end of all perfection in this world.

perfect the perfect sunsets, the perfect buildings, the perfect people, the perfect ideals, the perfect writings. The furthest extent, David's seen it all, but all of them have an end as well as a beginning.

They can all be measured compared to our God and our God's commandment or his rulership over heaven and earth, even over eternity itself.

How meager are the perfections that we can see in this life, this world of sight? when we reach the limit of earthly perfection, the perfection of God himself is only just beginning.

[29 : 33] And that's why David can trust the Lord to shield him from the wicked. That's why David can just brush them off at this point. Because he has this confident trust in the God of all perfections.

The God of heavenly perfections. The God of infinite perfections. well, finally, let's shift our attention to the 13th stanza, the Hebrew letter Mem.

Mem comes from the symbol for water. And it represents the Jewish tradition, the idea of God's ocean of wisdom and knowledge.

Interestingly, at least to me, there are two forms of this letter. There's an open form and a closed form. to the Jewish teachers, God has opened up much of his wisdom for his creatures to hear and understand, but much of his knowledge is still hidden.

We read about this mystery in Deuteronomy 29 where it says the hidden things belong to the Lord. But what he's revealed belonged to us and to our children forever.

[30 : 50] So mem is this ocean of wisdom that the Lord possesses. In stanza 12, we saw David turn a corner from focusing on his enemies to being mindful of the word, the works and faithfulness of God.

He remembered who he belonged to, a trustworthy, loving father whose faithfulness endures to all generations. With this Godward confidence, the wicked who waited to destroy David could be easily dismissed.

But let's read this stanza. Verse 97, Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. You, through your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients because I keep your precepts.

I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep your word. I have not departed from your judgments, for you yourself have taught me.

[32 : 09] How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through your precepts I get understanding, therefore, I hate every false way.

David now, in this stanza, is opening up his heart, sharing his love for Yahweh's law. It may seem strange to some to hear that anyone would credit the law, the commandments, the rules of God, as the avenue by which we receive wisdom and understanding.

Wisdom that makes me wiser than my enemies. Wisdom that gives me more understanding than all my teachers, even more than the ancients, going back thousands of years.

How can that be? That God's rules, his commands, his law, gives him wisdom and understanding. Of course, you've seen those words meditation and keep.

They're again key words in how we gain this wisdom. And the phrase, for they are ever with me, refers to the commandments. And it implies memorization.

[33 : 33] It's also a key to David's claim. But I think that just like in the second stanza that we looked at last week, where the Lord is personally referred to at least 14 times.

The same is true here. He himself is once again the focal point, the main idea behind King David's great love for God's words.

I believe the writer is sharing a deep secret with us in this part of his poem. The personal gracious love bond he has with his God.

Look at verses 101 and 102. Is David bragging in these verses? I have restrained my feet.

I have not departed from your judgments. No, I don't think he's bragging here. He's merely describing the depth of his love. Lord, he's saying, the love we share is so special to me, it's no longer a chore to restrain my feet from evil.

[34 : 48] It's a delight to do that. How could I depart from your judgments when you yourself have been my loving teacher?

you see, it's by grace which the king has been given a new heart, new life, new desires.

And that grace has rendered even the bitterest words from his God indescribably sweet to him. Even his commandments.

As our minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit through the word, the sweet and savory lies of the enemy become loathsome on our tongues.

We long to turn away from those lies. Things that seemed to be sweet before. And Jesus, our Savior's, every saying drips honey, is just so sweet to us to hear his words and to read them all through the scriptures.

[36 : 01] Can our enemies give us that kind of heavenly taste buds for the words of God? There's no way. Nor can teachers like the scribes and the Pharisees and the ancient philosophers who feel too proud to admit their own smallness and ignorance.

They can't give us that special taste of God's word. David's appetite for the confections of the word of God is a pure product of his love and grace.

God's love and grace make them sweet to him. And the new heart given to him because of Christ, because of the work of Christ.

So we've moved from a desperate fainting soul to a soul that is renewed in its confidence in a faithful God.

And now to a testifying soul, testifying of his love for the Lord. How I love your law because you yourself have taught me.

[37 : 19] And now his words are sweet. And part of that love is the hatred of every false way. Lord, how can I stray from you when you've so lovingly taught me, when you've opened my eyes, when you've given me that heart that finds your words so delectable.

Oh, how I love your law. And that's our look at those three stanzas. May the Lord use that in our lives. Word is missed.