

THE VICTORY LIFE

in

PSALM 119

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

SNARES DISCOVERED

CAPH

**“My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.
Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?
For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.**

**How many are the days of thy servant?
when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?**

**The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.
All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.
They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.
Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth”**
(Psalms 119:81-88)

“The proud have digged pits for me” (Psalm 119:85).

THE PSALMIST IS IN DIFFICULTY. The enemy is striking hard! It is a renewed attack. Job was right. **“Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.”**

These are ideal moments for the tormentor of souls to ironically ask, **“Where is thy God?”** Where is He? Why He is near — **“a present help in trouble.”** God can brighten the darkest horizon with the light of His comfort. **“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,”** He assures. **“And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned.”**

Waters! Fires! These are more than mere figures of speech when translated into experience. They are real waters. They are swirling, dashing, turbulent waves — an actual tempest, threatening to inundate plans, to uproot happiness, to submerge hope, to destroy faith. And the fires? They too are real. The flames often are hot.

“**My soul fainteth for thy salvation** [deliverance]” (v. 81), he confesses rather wearily.

But fatigue is not failure. It is not unusual for strength to wane. Those who wait on the Lord will have their strength replenished. This is what the psalmist is determined to do, for in the same breath, he adds, “**But I hope in thy word.**”

Herein is the secret of steadfastness. Herein is the anchor for the fainting heart. Therefore, let the tentacles of your faith become entwined about the indestructible Word of God. Then you will build on the Rock foundation against which all the fierce waves and giant billows of Satanic power will dash in vain.

One who has had a transforming vision of the Lord will not be jarred loose from his mooring. He has the persuasion that what he has committed unto the Lord will ever be safely guarded. He had already trusted everything he is, and has, to an able Deliverer. He does not share with David such Wishful thinking as “**Oh, that I had wings like a dove. Then would I fly away and be at rest.**”

There is a repose of confidence concerning the ultimate outcome when one allows God to make the way of escape.

Most of us must be reminded frequently that triumph in Christ does not guarantee freedom from trial, but that it does assure favor when trial comes. “God hath not promised skies ever blue, flower-strewn pathways always for you.”

What military general would promise his soldiers freedom from wounds in combat? What athletic director would assure his players escape from injury in a contest? If such promises could be made, valor would be non-existent; bravery would never merit a citation. But, does the soldier refuse to do battle? Does the athlete fear his contest? No! Neither should the follower of Christ hesitate one moment to suffer reproach with his Lord!

But we must not be unsympathetic in our attitude toward this young man. We know he is in a trying situation when he prays, “**My eyes fail for thy word**” (v. 82).

There was a long and eager waiting. But what was blurring his vision? Tears, simply tears, the kind which you and I have shed at some turn in the road of life. Tears stain the faces of folk in every clime, in every age. They are not necessarily an indication of weakness.

Visualize, if you will, the iron Napoleon as he witnessed his seemingly interminable troops marching into the Prussian campaign. Tears became noticeably evident on his cheeks. Many a valiant soldier has been acclaimed a hero in battle, and given appropriate decorations in honor thereof, who had left the induction station with moistened eyes when torn from the arms of his mother or sweetheart.

“**When wilt thou comfort me?**” (v. 82), the psalmist asks rather impulsively.

An improper question to put to the Lord? Not exactly.

At least it is a very natural one. A troubled heart again and again will raise the inquiry: “***When will the waters subside? When will the fires be quenched?***” But did you notice? In the very language of his prayer he betrays a firm confidence that God will comfort him — sometime.

The conflict, of course, has made him a little restless, or if you insist, a bit impatient. This is further reflected in verse 84, where he asks, “***How many are the days of thy servant?***” How wonderfully patient is our blessed Lord with all His followers! He knows each aching heart; He sees each falling tear; He never forsakes us in our times of desperation, for it is written, “***I will never under any circumstance leave you in the lurch.***”

We listen now as the psalmist gives a personal description of his case. “***I am become like a bottle in the smoke***” (v. 83), he laments.

It was common in Asia, we are told, for leathern vessels known as “***wineskins***” to become darkened and to shrivel and crack when hanging close to the fire. This, he seems to feel, is an apt characterization of depressing influence of grief which is infiltrating his troubled breast.

The Great High Priest who listens to these multiplied heart cries from day to day has felt both the smoke and fire of trial and is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. It is not that He does not care when our hearts are pained too deeply for mirth and song. The gold is only pure and shiny and valuable when the dross is purged away. The crucible of suffering is often the gateway to richer blessing and to sweeter fellowship with the Lord.

“***The proud have dug pits for me***” (v. 85), he maintains.

But this is not unusual. What should we expect when we face a cruel enemy? In the recent Korean war, captured soldiers were treated in an imponderably brutal manner. Weakened through brainwashing, they were ruthlessly prodded along death-dealing marches, then in some revealed instances pushed heartlessly over cliffs. Godless enemies are capable of blood-curdling inhumanities. Spiritual foes are not one whit more considerate of the welfare of those whom they attack. But it is much to the advantage of the psalmist to have discovered these subtle snares. The enemy cannot be engaged until he is located.

Satan is a treacherous trickster. He will block the course that leads to the sinner’s salvation and blast his hopes for eternity. He seeks also to blind the eyes of the saint, to baffle his mind and to blight his testimony. His deceptive and destructive ability is being woefully minimized, if not willingly ignored. His appearance is as an angel of light. His appeal is multiform and his field of strategy exceedingly extensive.

Man’s weakness is his main avenue of approach, and he will dog the believer’s path while his emissaries dig the pitfalls. But the enemy in this case is detected.

The psalmist’s method of dealing with the foe is the wisest and the best — indeed the only successful means of counterattack.

Hear his outpoured declaration:

“I hope in thy word . . . I do not forget thy statutes . . . I forsook not thy precepts.”

Somehow he has learned as we all must learn that **“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”**

Perhaps our curiosity is aroused. We would like to know of what the **“dug pits”** consist.

In other words, what kind of temptations did people have in those long ago days? But would we be wiser if we knew? Any more able to resist the Devil? The figure which the psalmist employs when he speaks of success is taken from the practice of hunters. They lay traps for their game. The type of snare used depends upon the kind of animal sought. We are forced to believe that Satan is quite up-to-date in his use of snares. Anything to trip a believer is readily adopted. Jesus said that the adversary has been both a murderer and a liar from the beginning.

A Christian philosopher some years ago allegorically described a convention in Hell.

The Devil was presiding. Addressing the chair, an impish demon spoke.

“Your Majesty, we could produce more godlessness on the earth if we concentrated our attack against the Church.”

Another, with the same respectful salute, disagreed.

“We can make greater progress, your Honor, by striking at the unity and affection of the home.”

The discussion was prolonged.

Finally, one proposed with a demoniacal grin what he termed a “masterstroke.” All paid rapt attention.

“Most Worshipful Master,” he began with a pretentious bow, “Let us destroy the chastity of womanhood. Then the home will crumble and the Church will collapse. We could begin with a cigarette, and later slip in a reefer. We could begin with a cocktail, move to champagne, then glamorize the thrill of heroin. We could begin with some simple jokes and stories slightly tainted, and proceed to the hilarious, spicy, suggestive kind to perforate moral restraint —”

Riotous applause of wicked glee brought an interruption and the deafening demand for adoption. Yes, the Devil is still digging pits. We must be aware of his snares. Better still, we must ever and always submit to the control and leadership of the Holy Spirit who will guard us from pitfalls and lead us in a way that is pleasing to God.

You will recall in the earlier part of the narrative that this young aspirant to holiness expressed his desire to live for the Lord.

We observed his former testimonies and promises. We witnessed him as he gained a clear vision of the Holy One; and yet he now must confess, as the fierceness of his struggle against temptation subsides, **“They had almost consumed me”** (v. 87).

Is not our need for the Advocate great? Jesus looked upon Peter with a solicitous tenderness, and said, **“I have prayed . . . that thy faith fail not.”**

How unable we are to cope with the enemy. How often we too are almost consumed.

The psalmist needs the quiet place, the throne room. He needs to wait upon God. **“Quicken me after thy lovingkindness”** (v. 88), he fervently prays.

Before he may be called upon to go through another such ordeal, he needs to be built up on that most holy faith.

“Quicken me!” he pleads.

Having been almost overcome by the tempter, he recognizes that his spiritual resources are sadly depleted. The appeal is for replenishment, and this is the most striking proof of a genuine desire to grow in the things of the Lord.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.”

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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