

THE VICTORY LIFE

in

PSALM 119

by

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CHAPTER THREE

HOPE LIES IN THE SKIES

GIMEL

**“Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.
Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.**

**“I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.
My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.
Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.
Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.
Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.**

“Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors” (Psalms 119:17-24)

“Deal bountifully with thy servant” (v. 17)

THE PSALMIST IS METHODICAL. His petitions sound as though he had spent some time at a drafting board, charting in careful detail his major necessities. We come upon him now in the act of prayer.

He had taken two steps in the right direction. Having heard a pointed appeal, supported by convincing examples, he made it known that there was only one worthwhile way of living as far as he was concerned.

He vowed that he would henceforth walk with God.

Then, raising some honest and pertinent questions about his need of cleansing, and confessing his fear of wandering, he agreed in his heart to respect the Word of Truth and delight himself in its teachings. He concurs with Jeremiah.

“It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” He must seek guidance from above.

“Deal bountifully with thy servant” (v. 17) is his initial supplication.

The need in his life is overwhelming!

The higher plane seems so far beyond his reach. He looks upon his spiritual poverty and knows at once that substantial assistance must come from above if progress is to be made in his new pursuit. In substance, he is saying, ***“Knowing as I do the weaknesses and wayward tendencies of my emotional being, O Lord, I will require a great amount of spiritual help if I am to rise commensurate with those who fear Thee and daily do Thy will.”***

But Heaven welcomes such wholesome heart-cries.

With relaxed confidence, we may be honest with God concerning our true condition. He knows all. Nothing is hid from Him. The more honest, and the more humble we are, the sooner will our prayers be answered.

Such praying indicates realization of the fact that God is both able and willing to deal graciously and abundantly. There is nothing niggardly about the Lord. He gives in full measure, heaped up, pressed down and running over. What is required, He can supply. There is no want to him who walks uprightly. As the **“clay”** is pliable in the skillful hands of the divine Potter, He will fashion the most uncomely one into a vessel of honor and usefulness.

If Moody in a modest place of merchandising could reach heavenward for sufficient grace to inspire and equip him for a world-wide ministry, then may anyone with the same faith and willingness do likewise. God is no respecter of persons.

The psalmist's request is not unreasonable. He knew he required liberal attention from Heaven. He simply made his request known. He had not heretofore because he had not asked. Now he asks, and with no hint of selfishness. On the contrary, he gives as his sole reason for the petition a most eloquent explanation — **“that I may live, and keep thy word”** (v. 17).

How many of us can match this? Do you wish to see the light of another day? Of living in it? Why? The primary reason most of us desire to live another day is to complete some project, share some event, to love and be loved, or simply to do things. All want to live, but few have ever poured into the ear of God such a holy motive for living as does the psalmist.

If each daybreak could present to this tottering world great companies of Christian people, dedicated to think and determined to act only within the sacred realm of divine instruction, what a momentous impact could be registered!

We could speak in such a commanding manner that Satan would tremble. The populace at large would be impressed with the Christian way of life and would desire it. The righteous would be more than **“scarcely saved”** (I Peter 4:18). There are oceans of possibilities for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Jesus said they shall be filled.

The most ready scribe or the most fluent orator would become a beggar for words in reducing to copy or presenting in oral message the fullest meaning of a completely surrendered life.

Noble attempts are made to answer folk who inquire about the subject. Often the words of explanation are like **“apples of gold in pictures of silver”** — interesting, appealing, challenging! But this singular utterance from the psalmist's contrite heart is difficult to excel: **“That I may live and keep thy word.”**

Only the power of God allowed to have its perfect work in a life could possibly bring a person to such a point as this.

We may go forward in meetings, join the most spiritual church, do personal work, and testify freely, but if we do not have the heart longing to keep God's precepts diligently, we utterly have missed the simple but profound truth of full surrender.

The apostles heard parables, witnessed miracles, and received instruction direct from Him who spake as never man spake, yet Jesus was forced to say indictingly: **“As yet they understand not the Scriptures.”**

On another occasion, He said with a tinge of grief in His voice, **“Why do ye not understand my speech?”** There is a sad deficiency in the experience of present-day Christians as well. Empty profession must give way to glowing reality.

As far as we know, this young psalmist had never witnessed a miracle, nor heard a parable on the deeper life, nor had he had an experience as the Emmaus sojourners in a physical contact with the Lord, but he had heard a heaven-sent message. It revealed to him that God blesses those who walk in the way of the undefiled, those who seek the Lord with their whole heart. It stirred his soul and filled his thoughts. It created a hunger and thirst after righteousness.

“Open thou mine eyes,” he continues, further proving his desire to live daily according to the instructions of the Bible.

A friend called us to his home one day to see a mother rabbit and her new little family.

He explained how he had earlier watched the expectant mother pulling white, downy fur from her body with which to make a bed for her offspring. When the little ones arrived, she covered them gently with the furry blanket. Because of unseasonable warmth she then uncovered her babies, and was now in the act of covering them again for the night. As we were watching, our friend asked the simple question: “Who taught the rabbit to do this?”

Why do we not let God tell us what to do daily?

He who put the instinct in the rabbit can give spiritual intelligence to the believer. But our eyes must be opened to see.

The Emmaus disciples required such an operation. Jesus opened the eyes of their understanding.

Subsequent to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and following his submission to the lordship of Christ, **“there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith.”**

It does not state that he received his sight. It states that he received sight. What sight did he receive? The sight for which our young friend in this Psalm is pleading. Only with such a clear vision is there a new horizon with countless privileges and joys.

The psalmist seeks an insight into and a clear appreciation of the reality of matters which heretofore had been merely superficial declarations. He knows that vision is primary. Where there is no vision the people perish. Where perception is lacking, progress is impeded.

He cannot keep the Word of God who does not possess a clear conception of its practical meanings.

Open eyes are prerequisite to an onward march.

This individual's eyes were not entirely closed. They were sufficiently open to see the challenging examples of godly folk, the advisability of emulating them, and the tremendous need in his own life.

He was conscious of the fact that something was fundamentally wrong in his own spiritual experience. But his eyes were not sufficiently open to see how he must proceed, to know how one so lacking as he could be triumphant, to understand how he could honor the Lord in a worthy walk. He is reaching, as it were, for the railing on the stairs — for something to assist him with each successive step in his ascent to a higher plane of spiritual living.

Eyes once open, the seeker waits with joyful anticipation to behold wondrous things from out of the Sacred Volume, the only source of light to direct his steps through the dark and confusing wilderness of this world. As another had stated earlier, **“Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel.”**

In both cases, the speakers were expressing the thought that they were done with the folly of picking a path through the jungle of reason.

And what were the wonderful things he expected to find in God's Word? Said Henry Ward Beecher:

“There are promises in God's Word that no man has ever tried to find. There are treasures of gold and silver in it for which man has never taken the pains to dig. . . . No architect ever conceived of such pictures, and carved dishes and statues as adorn its apartments. It contains treasures that silver, and gold and precious stones are not to be mentioned with.”

The prayer continues: **“I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me”** (v. 19).

Personal prayers of deep concern, bewilderment and frustration may sound like incoherent, unintelligent, unrelated utterances. Of course, they are intended only for Him who knows the secrets of the heart and who understands when no one else can. Our most sincere petitions occur when the Holy Spirit is interposing Himself on our behalf with sighs too deep for words. In this instance, we will appreciate the importance of the context.

Why did this young man refer to himself as a “**stranger in the earth**”?

In what sense was he a stranger? When did he become a stranger? *He referred to himself as a stranger because of a sudden realization that he was detached from so much which, up to this moment, had occupied his attention and filled his life.* He is in the midst of a transition.

He has discarded “**the beggarly elements**,” to which the Apostle Paul refers, but has not as yet become clothed with the moral excellencies of the Lord. He has “**put off the old man with his deeds**,” but has not as yet “**put on the new**.” In modern parlance, he is asking, “Where do I go from here?”

Entering into a closer practical relationship with the Lord automatically cuts one off from some former engagements and even from some former associates. This is not the easiest matter to explain to unspiritual people. It is sometimes painful to part company with friends of long standing, but “**how can two walk together except they be agreed**” (Amos 3:3)?

Saul of Tarsus had his last contact with most of his compatriots when he met Jesus along the road to Damascus. Nor can we expect that all our pre-Christian friends or former worldly companions will pledge with Ruth, “**Whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.**” Sometimes those of one's own household will not only fail to understand but will criticize sharply.

The psalmist is still praying. “**Hide not thy commandments from me**,” he urgently pleads.

What an unusual supplication! Does he fear that his opened eyes will have withheld from them the very encouragement he must have? Does he think for one moment that God would leave him in darkness without the true Light?

What he apparently, means to convey in his emotional appeal is this: “I have given up all, Lord, to follow Thee. If I do not have Thy wonderful Word, I have nothing. Remember me, therefore, Lord, as others forsake.”

But God's Word is revealed, not concealed.

He does not hide it from inquiring people. Jesus said, “**Ye shall know the truth.**”

The psalmist has yet to discover that this heavenly revelation is a “**lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path.**”

His major concern is hinted in verse 21: **“Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.”**

Would his proneness to wander, of which he is conscious (v. 10), ever result in his departure from the law of the Lord? Would pride in his life ever affect his respect unto the testimonies of God so that divine rebuke must be registered against him. This is what he apparently fears.

He must not be deceived by thinking he can gain spiritual heights in his own strength or understanding. He desires that the Scriptures shall ever be his guiding light.

“My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times” (v. 20) is one of the psalmist's most striking confessions.

It is quite difficult to express some of our deeper emotions, but here is a rather successful attempt.

Can anyone doubt his sincerity? The terminology employed is exceptional. Job remarked that he esteemed the Word of God more necessary than his daily food, and others have emphasized their love for divine Truth, but here is a statement which pulsates with fervency of desire. Bishop Taylor speaks of it somewhere as “the violence of the desire bursting itself with its fullness into dissolution.”

We speak and read of the heart being broken, but rarely if ever do we refer to the soul in this way. It is a vehement longing. He is saying: **“My soul is broken small; it is crushed.”**

In the secular realm we would term it an obsession. In the spiritual sphere it is a passionate yearning which cannot be assuaged short of realization. Persecution cannot dull the luster of its fervent appeal. Pain cannot minimize the fullness of the promised blessing. Desertion by friends cannot shift the focus of the affections. Nor can the most treacherous deceiver substitute anything when opened eyes see the awaiting joy.

In spite of his multiplying spiritual qualities, we are reminded again and again that this young man is most human. We will see many weaknesses as the spotlight of Scripture is turned upon him.

Here is one: **“Remove from me reproach and contempt”** (v. 22).

Much dross must yet be consumed before the pure gold appears in his life, yet he cries to be removed from the crucible.

However, it is not now the hour for reproach and contempt to be removed. That hour, though drawing near, has not yet arrived. Until Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit, he will buffet and blast the believer. But fear not, little flock, the Lord's grace is sufficient. He who endured such contradiction of sinners has promised to be with His own until the end of the age.

But notice, please, the chief source of our friend's disconcerting trials.

“Princes also did sit and speak against me” (v. 23), he complains.

People in high offices, people of great influence, can always speak with more convincing force. When the disapproval of such is voiced, it carries much weight in the thinking of many.

While it seems inconceivable that a person of moral integrity, especially one in high office, should denounce or discourage one who has declared himself devoted to the Lord, it nevertheless happens.

Perhaps we have here some suggestion why it is true today, as in other days, when a trusting heart sues for higher territory every inch is contested. Satan will deploy his ablest agents along the course of the saint's dedicated pathway.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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