

Truth Talk Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Our Heart's True Desire

Stanza 13 – Verses 97-104

(Part 1)

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.⁹⁸ You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me.⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.¹⁰¹ I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word.¹⁰² I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me.¹⁰³ How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!¹⁰⁴ Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

In the two previous stanzas the Psalmist opened a window allowing us to peer into his soul as he walked a dark and difficult portion of the path. With painful honesty, he articulated how he felt as he languished in the house of affliction where God fed him the bread of sorrow. Sooner or later all pilgrims who choose to walk the Way of the Word will join him at this table. And when we do, we will desperately seek the same comfort that sustained him. We will look to the same source for deliverance. God's words provided comfort as well as deliverance to the Psalmist and will do so for all pilgrims who follow his example and cultivate his commitment to that Word in all of their ways for all of their days.

Interestingly, most Christians would confidently assert the same claim the Psalmist makes to love God's law in the opening verse of the stanza! Many believers confidently assert their undying adoration of God's Word without considering that they may be asked to confirm that claim. Many who claim to love the Bible more than life itself have scant evidence of their utter devotion. In some cases their evidence comes in the form of a misplaced loyalty to a particular version of God's Word while their lives or ministries reflect almost no conformity to the demands contained therein. Sometimes their love consists primarily of speaking and singing about God's Word in church but there is no willingness to conform to the demands of Scripture throughout the rest of their lives. However, this was not the case with the Psalmist. Nor can it be the case with any pilgrim who desires to experience the stability in suffering and affliction displayed by the Psalmist throughout his spiritual journey. His bold assertion to love God's law rang true in the context of his daily life. It can and must ring true in ours.

I. His Confident Confession (v 97a)

Oh, how I love Your law!

The Psalmist begins this stanza by proclaiming his love for God's law in unmistakable, passionate terms that spring from the depth of his heart. Interestingly, this passionate love for God's law is equally sweet to his soul (v. 103). So passionate is his confession of this love for God's law that it is the sole focus of the stanza. There are no petitions to the Lord, no mention of afflictions, and no trace of the depressed emotional state that permeated the previous two stanzas. Instead, there is a

cry of joyful affirmation expressing pure, unadulterated love for God's law. However, this is neither the first or only time the Psalmist declares his love for God's Word. He affirms his love for God's commandments in verses 47, 48, and 127. He proclaims his love for God's statutes or testimonies in verse 119. He expresses his love of God's precepts in verse 159. Here he loves God's instruction or "torah". He reiterates this love for God's law in verses 113 and 163. Clearly, he has come to love the Word of God and this love becomes a dominant theme throughout his pilgrimage.

Not only does this stanza proclaim his love for God's law, it also contains information that helps to further clarify the nature of his claim. What exactly is the nature of his love for God's Word? Often the term love directs attention to one's affinity for something or someone. However, the particular term employed by the Psalmist actually focuses on a different component of love than affinity or affection. The term is used often in the Old Testament in contexts where obedience is mentioned as an expected traveling companion to this word. It has reference to commitment to something or someone that displays itself in appropriate actions and responses. For example, in Exodus 20:6 God stated that He would show lovingkindness to those who love Him and keep His commandments. In Deuteronomy 10:13-13 Moses reminded Israel that God's requirements of them were not burdensome nor numerous. Rather they were to fear the Lord, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him with all their heart and soul, and keep His commandments and statutes.

So, when the Psalmist proclaims his love for God's Word, he is not merely articulating a fond affection for God's instructions. He is expressing his personal commitment to living them out in his walk by conforming his life to those instructions. The object of his committed love is none other than the "torah" of God – God's revealed will for the life of His servant.

This claim is no small matter for the Psalmist. Loving God means loving His Word and no one loves God's Word who does not consistently attempt to conform to its demands. There are many who are quick to affirm a love for God's Word whose life betrays the truth – they have no real commitment to that Word. They may have a fond affection for it as long as it does not intrude into their life or make uncomfortable demands upon them. In some cases they may even make bold affirmations about the Word of God that sound impressive in the Sanctuary and among the congregation of the righteous. However, upon encountering that individual in the way of life outside of the Sanctuary, his claim to love God's law vanishes like misty breath on a cold morning. However, there is sure evidence to back up the claim of a man who boldly asserts his love for God's Word.

II. His Confirmatory Evidence (vv. 97b, 98b, 99b)

. . . it is my meditation all the day.

Is there any defining biblical evidence confirming someone's claim to love God's law? How can a claim like this truly be evaluated? This stanza affirms such evidence exists and provides an accurate revelation of what comprises such evidence. The evidence includes experiencing the benefits of such a love for God's law in personal life. It includes consistently applying God's instruction or "torah" to the practices and habits of life. It is displayed in spiritual responses that are defined and set by God's Word to the circumstances of life. All of these are important confirmatory evidences that support a man's claim to truly love the Word of God. However, there is one primary piece of evidence without which none of the other pieces are possible. And it is precisely this piece of evidence that the Psalmist presents from his life as the starting place for establishing the veracity of his claim to love God's Word. This first and primary evidence is his constant practice of meditating on God's Word.

What exactly does the Psalmist mean when he states that God's Law is his meditation all the day? Meditation in this stanza (and in the Scriptures in general) implies more than just quiet contemplation. Meditation is not passive. It is an active musing or thoughtful contemplation of all or a portion of God's Word. Meditation implies more than careful thought about God's Word; it implies an objective for such thought – the intentional application of the conclusions of biblical meditation to one's life and practice. This is what David referred to in Psalm 1 when he talked about the "blessed

man” who meditates on the Law of God day and night (Psalm 1:2). It is evident from the rest of the verses in Psalm 1 that this man is doing his meditating in the midst of the activity of life rather than while locked away in seclusion. His mediation caused him to reject specific counsel he receives from certain kinds of people. Meditating on God’s Law caused him to avoid the walk or life practices of certain individuals. His constant meditation on God’s Word helped him to recognize and reject the values and mindset of those who reject God’s authority and refuse His instruction. This is in essence the practice of our Pilgrim. He meditates or concentrates on God’s Laws constantly to the point that he can say, “they are always with me!” (v. 98).

But while this may have always been his desire, he gives evidence in the psalm that this practice may have developed progressively in his life. He has spoken of his commitment to meditate on God’s Word on several occasions earlier in the psalm. For instance, he mentions his intention to meditate on God’s precepts in verse 15 of the second stanza where we find that he is actually doing so when faced by opposition (v. 23). He promises to meditate on God’s wonders in the third stanza if God will help him to understand the pathway described in God’s precepts (v. 27). If God will send lovingkindness to the psalmist, he promises to meditate on God’s statutes (v. 48). He observes the practice of the wicked and determines to respond by meditating on God’s precepts (v. 78). At this point in his journey he has come to understand the importance of mediation and has full intention to do so in his life – but it is still an intention. We find him actually doing some meditating in verse 27, but for the most part, during the first stages of his pilgrimage, meditation, though certainly valued, remains his aspiration and intention.

However, by the time we meet our pilgrim in this stanza, meditation has gone beyond aspired intention to firm and committed practice. He is actually doing what in previous stanzas may have been his good intention. Now it is his constant practice. God’s words are with him all the time (v. 98). They are his constant meditation (v. 99). This practice remains his throughout the remaining stanzas of the psalm and actually becomes sweeter. For instance, in verse 148 the psalmist expresses his longing for night to fall that he might have quiet, uninterrupted time to contemplate and consider God’s Word without the interruptions and distractions of life during the day! Clearly, our pilgrim has progressed in his ability and desire to meditate on God’s Word. And so can we.

Meditation is a primary evidence of deep devotion to God and to His Word. As believers we instinctively know this to be true and we initially aspire to make this practice a consistent reality in our lives. And so we set off like the Psalmist did in the second stanza to meditate on God’s Word by reading it carefully and regularly. Obviously, this is where biblical meditation starts. Without regular, careful reading of God’s Word, meditation becomes an exercise in subjective frivolity. Meditation implies careful, considered contemplation on the precise statements that God has given which requires that we know and understand those statements. So meditation begins with regular and careful reading of Scripture. However, for meditation to become a constant activity in our lives, we must cultivate the ability to carry God’s Word with us wherever we go. We must develop the ability to recall the relevant portions of God’s word precisely when we face particular circumstances and situations that often arise unexpectedly in life.

Conclusion:

Interestingly, it appears from the Psalmist’s journey that it was the unexpected, unforeseen circumstances of opposition, affliction, or personal failure that drove the Psalmist to the Scripture to discover and retain the guidance and instruction contained therein for such circumstances in life. In other words, we don’t become good at meditation through our good intentions. We become good at meditation when the storms of life force us to the Word for survival. We don’t become good “meditators” to impress God or others but rather to survive life! Find a man who meditates deeply on the Word of God and whose words and ways are shaped by that Word and you will find a man who bears the scars of affliction, suffering, and trial in the way. In the house of suffering, God teaches us He is our relief. At the table of affliction and sorrow we learn that God is our comfort. As we face opposition from our closest fellows, God reminds us that He is our friend and defender. Even with

our face pressed hard into the dust of personal failure, we discover God is our health and deliverance. When we face a fork in the path, God's Word gives accurate and reliable guidance.

Unfortunately, in the early portion of the journey we tend to learn this last lesson by taking wrong forks and having to return to God's Word for guidance back to the right path. However, as we continue to come back to God's Word for help, as the reading of it becomes our committed, daily practice, and as we insist on an exact obedience to it in our own lives, in time we will find ourselves saying with the Psalmist, "Oh how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day!"