
I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors. Give your servant a pledge of good; let not the insolent oppress me. My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfilment of your righteous promise. Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes. I am your servant; give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies! It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken. Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.

(Psalm 119:121–128)

Introduction

What do Christians sing in their misery? That might seem like an absurd question to ask. Perhaps the thought of a broken-hearted, lonely, or despairing Christian is so absurd that it's comical. And yet I ask the question honestly.

We have been making our way through Psalm 119, the great psalm concerning God's Word and the blessings that it brings to us. And yet, although a covenantal *celebration* of God's faithfulness to his people and the great security that his word brings, these prayers are drenched in themes of affliction, despair, suffering, and oppression. So I ask again, just what do Christians sing in their misery? Do miserable Christians have anything to sing about? Psalm 119:121–128 will show us that they do.

Pursuing Righteousness Amidst Suffering

According to one pastor, "In the psalms, God has given the church a language which allows it to express even the *deepest agonies of the human soul* in the context of *worship*." The deep agony of the human soul seen in our text is that of *pursuing righteousness amidst suffering*.

Christians are called to live holy, set apart lives; lives free from sin: gluttony, pride, impurity, and hate. And yet, some of us may be resonating with the psalmist here: "I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors" (v. 121).

Some of us have pursued what is "just and right." We may have done so imperfectly, but we have fled from sin's harmful way, have denied ourselves the abundance of possessions, have pleaded for humility, have closed our eyes at impurity, have been content with our wages, have sought justice where possible, have loved those who aren't like us, have surrounded ourselves with God's people, and have meditated on his word day and night, and yet, even while doing what is just and right, have been left open, bare, and vulnerable. We have been left to our oppressors like the psalmist. At the end of it all, our words are simply, "Give your servant a pledge of good" (v. 122). "God, please give me something to hold on to."

So I ask again, *what do Christians sing in their misery?*

Have you been left to your oppressors: a boss that is impossible to please; pressure to conform to social and cultural expectations; friends deserting you and speaking lies behind your back? Are you at the

point at which your prayer is simply, “God deliver me”? Are your eyes, like the psalmist’s, wasting away, waiting for God’s salvation (v. 123)?

As one pastor again says, “Perhaps we have drunk so deeply at the well of materialism that we simply do not know what to do with such cries of pain, suffering, oppression, and loneliness, and thus regard them as little short of embarrassing.”

Our suffering is *not* a matter of embarrassment. This is not how we are supposed to think of suffering in the church of God. For this great and one-day glorious bride of Christ was ransomed at the expense of a suffering servant, with the price of a bloody brow, with pierced hands, and with the wailing cry of God-forsakenness. And so, as God’s church, we ought to *embrace* our suffering. Let it have its true and lasting effect on us.

Let me explain what I mean by this.

You see, it is in suffering that we gain access into a very particular channel or road to travel on, in which to see our *true neediness*. Suffering ultimately shows us that *we are not God*. It makes us *dependent* on him, and it produces—or at least it should produce—humility in us. We become utterly reliant on him, the only one who really can act, the only one who can bring about salvation, and who alone will fulfil his righteous promise.

Brothers and sisters, let us not run away from such opportunities to *lean* on him. Although we may, like the psalmist, long for God to act and not leave us oppressed, it is often only through these trials that we are in any way inclined to depend on God. For, as the apostle said, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The Pledge of Good

So, *what do Christians sing in their misery?* What do we hope in? How can we persevere in doing good amidst our suffering? The answer is that we have the hope that the psalmist here longed for: “Give your servant a pledge of good; let not the insolent oppress me. My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfilment of your righteous promise” (vv. 122–123).

We have the sure pledge of God’s final deliverance seen most clearly in his beloved Son—Jesus Christ—who walked this very same sin-laden and fallen earth that we live on today. Jesus began to push back the kingdom of darkness that had a grip on everything we’ve known. His life was the very fulfilment of the promise that the psalmist looks to.

If you are unfamiliar with the story, the promise that God would make all things new and radically transform the world is a *very* old promise. God’s word tells us that he made us in his very own image to share in his rule and reign, and yet, when given the chance to defy this rule and set humanity up in the place of God, Adam and Eve did just that, plunging all of humankind into a distorted relationship with the eternal and holy Creator.

But God, in his love and mercy, promised to send a seed, the offspring of a woman, to restore God’s reign and rule again on earth, and to draw out all who would follow him. God so designed that this seed—Jesus—would suffer at the hands of sinners and be mocked, beaten, deserted, alone, and ultimately crucified for our sins—for our rebellion against God. God saw fit to lay on Jesus our trespasses—if we

would but come to him in faith, trusting in his death on the cross to appease the rightful anger of God that burned against our waywardness.

This Jesus, now raised from the dead, lives today, to intercede for all who would come to him in faith and repentance. If you haven't already flung yourself at the feet of this suffering servant, Jesus, for the removal of your sins, come to Christ. Do so and *know* the salvation of the Lord.

Friends, Jesus Christ is the pledge that we see here in v. 122, the assurance of good that God so bountifully gives to those who trust in his righteous promise.

Bandaged by the Word

Vital to understanding this hope—the reason we can sing in our misery—is that it doesn't exist outside of the *written word*. Put differently, God's plan for us to do what is just and right amidst suffering involves us being *bandaged, and covered, and bound up in his word*. Consider our text: “Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes. I am your servant; give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies!” (vv. 124–125).

This gospel of Jesus Christ does not exist apart from the very pages of Scripture. God's written word is the great star from which the rays of the gospel radiate. Being assured of our surety in Jesus is rooted in the very knowledge of God's written word.

Have you trusted in a false gospel? Where have you sought to be assured of your salvation? Has it been in the so-called blessings that you have received from God? Or has your identity as God's child been rocked at the sudden loss of success or health or relationships?

Brothers and sisters, we need to be rid of all forms of pseudo-gospels—not that there *is* another gospel—for all other “gospels” are utter distortions of the one *true* gospel. Instead, rest in the gospel of Jesus Christ, knowing that every day in which the insolent might oppress you, your salvation is drawing nearer. God so wishes to cover and bind and protect you with his word—his gospel.

Oh how we need to be equipped with the true and lasting gospel of Jesus Christ. We need the belt of truth. If you need help applying this gospel to your life, find a Christian who can explain to you how to do so. Your pursuit of righteousness amidst suffering will be directly proportionate to your knowledge and intimacy with the Scriptures. We need to be tightly bound by God's life-giving word.

By knowing God's gospel, you will be able to fend off foes and temptations to sin. But on the other hand, a shallow knowledge of the gospel will only leave you exposed and living bait for sin.

The Dark Cloth of Judgement

Before we conclude, it's vital that we understand the *entirety* of God's salvation. You see, the reality of God's salvation—his righteous promise—is that there is *another side to the same coin*. The righteous promise of Christ is our assurance of good. Yet, at the same time, this gospel is equally *condemning*. For all who *reject* the salvation of God—the righteous promise of Christ—God's gospel also brings certain and sure *judgement*. “It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken” (v. 126).

Praise God that, for the Christian, God *has* acted most triumphantly in Jesus. Those who place their trust in Jesus receive the assurance, the promise of forgiveness from sins. But, by consequence, this places a necessary burden on those who *reject* the purposes of God.

I wonder, where would you find yourself right now if God were to act and bring about his final salvation, gathering in those who love and long for his appearing? Please do not harden your heart toward God's great gift in Christ today. God will act out in judgment as surely as he will save those who cling to Jesus. He is both merciful and *just*.

God brings his salvation *through* judgement. As Jim Hamilton says, "justice, then, serves as the dark cloth on which God will display the diamond of his mercy."

The Dual Pledge

Finally, as we bring our time together to a close, note that we can and should pursue what is right amidst our suffering because of the surety of God's salvation—Jesus Christ, the pledge of our good. Such good news as found in his precious word should produce in us a dual pledge, two commitments: love for his word, and hatred every false way. And we see this in the last two verses of our present section: "Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way" (vv. 127–128).

You see, amidst suffering, there will be every temptation to give in, to throw in the towel, to give up on doing what is just and right. Perhaps your children have worn you down. Perhaps the pressure from friends or colleagues to compromise is just too much of a burden to tolerate. Perhaps your boss is just unbearable.

Be that as it may, there will be a temptation to seek *temporary* salvation over God's *final* salvation, which only he can bring about. And so, in light of doing good amidst suffering, and in light of God's final salvation through judgement, the psalmist pledges to both love God's word, and to hate all evil.

As trials seem to gain more of us, we see the *clarity* of God's purposes. We understand our *dependence* on him, our eyes long for his salvation, and the very act of clinging to God's gospel in the word produces in us a desire and longing for that very word. It is a longing far above fine gold—far beyond anything this fading world has to offer.

As trials produce in us a desire and longing for God's gospel, we grow calloused and hardy against every false way, against all evil. The way of the gospel is the way of *righteousness*. What follows is the very *hatred* of sin, which is simply to hate what God hates and to love what God loves. And so we begin to *imitate* the great one who first created us in his *own image*. The great reversal has begun, and will steadily continue till we see him face to face.

So, *what do Christians sing in their misery?* We sing, and pray, and glory in our *suffering*, knowing that, as Paul said, it is producing in us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Christian, embrace your suffering, even when you have done what is just and right. God has given you the ultimate pledge of good—his very own Son—so love and cherish his gospel, hate every false way, for God's salvation is coming.

AMEN