

A MAN WHO FEARED THE LORD

Psalm 119:113-120

Intro: With my title for this evening I have sought to describe the psalmist as he describes himself. We can always tell the character of any person by what he loves and what he hates. The psalmist had declared where he stood when he wrote in verse 97 that he loved the law of God, *i.e.*, the Word of God, and evidence of that love was the way his mind was focused upon the Word “all the day.” In the next stanza, beginning with verse 105 we see that the psalmist had made the Word of God his guide for daily life in the darkness of this world. But then in verse 107 he mentions that he was “afflicted very much,” and then in verse 110 he tells how “the wicked have laid a snare of me.” And the last part of that verse tells what their objective was – to draw him away from the Word, to make it difficult for him to obey the Lord.

Behind the actions of wicked men is the Wicked One. He hates the Word of God, and he hates anyone who loves the Word, and who seeks to live by the Word. It would be one thing if the wicked would go one way, and the child of God could go the other way, the way that pleases the Lord, but that is not the kind of a world that we live in over which the Devil rules as “the god of this world.” He doesn’t want anyone to love the Word. He doesn’t want anyone to love the Lord. He doesn’t want anyone to obey the Lord.

The psalmist was experiencing that opposition as we come to verse 113. And he does an excellent job of telling us how the Lord stands behind His Word, and stands with His people when they love His Word. And we see how the opposition that the psalmist was facing, drew him even closer to the Lord.

We learn from verse 113 what the psalmist hated. He hated “vain thoughts.” Notice, if your Bible uses italics, that “vain” is in italics. The translators were trying to indicate to us the kind of thoughts that the psalmist was talking about. This is the equivalent of human thoughts. Some commentators say that this refers to a double-minded man. It suggests that the wicked may agree with the Word on some points, but definitely not at all. And when a person is divided between the Word and his own thoughts, or the thoughts of other men, it is always the human thoughts that dominate. The psalmist learned that there can be no compromise between the Word of God and the wisdom of men. They are as

different from each other as light is from darkness, as day is from night. The psalmist hated that kind of thinking. And instead of pulling him away from the Word, it made him love the Word even more.

But it did another thing which the psalmist mentioned in verse 114. It drew him more to the Lord. He learned that the Lord was the only One Who could protect him from such enemies. And so he called the Lord his “hiding place” and his “shield.”

Two thoughts are indicated here. Sometimes he would run from the enemy to escape from those who were determined to turn him away from the Word. In those instances the Lord was his “hiding place.” But on other occasions, as with David, and Jeremiah, and all of the prophets, as well as with Peter and Paul and John and Stephen (as we learned this morning), the child of God is called upon to face the enemy. Then the Lord becomes his “shield,” the One Who is his Protector. The word “hope” suggests trust, standing for the truth of the Word, and even waiting upon the Lord for His support.

It is interesting to see how opposition tends to make the child of God even stronger in his faith. The Devil’s purpose, and the purpose of wicked men, is to destroy our faith, but as Paul taught in Romans 8, the Lord makes us “more than conquerors.”

The one verse in this stanza which is not directed to the Lord, is verse 115. Here the psalmist turned to his enemies to let them know what his decision was. This decision was made, not after the conflict started, but before it started. That is why it is important for all of us to take our stand even before we are tested. Many years later James wrote:

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded (James 4:7-8).

I am sure that the people of God in OT times learned this from their own experience.

But verse 116 brings an important truth to our attention.

It would be easy for us to think that there was something about the psalmist of a personal nature that made him stand against his enemies to

tell them that he was not going to do what they wanted him to do. The pressure can often be very strong, overwhelmingly strong, when people are trying to get us to turn away from the Word, and to turn away from the Lord. We have to admit that it took a lot of courage, a lot of strength, for the psalmist to tell his enemies that he was going to “keep the commandments” of his God. (Notice that “evildoers” is plural, suggesting that the psalmist was dealing with more than one at a time. It also could mean that the psalmist had done this on more than one occasion.)

One of the best illustrations of this kind of a situation, was demonstrated by Daniel’s three friends. You will remember how Nebuchadnezzar had an image of himself built, and notified his people that when the musical instruments sounded, everyone was to fall down to worship the image of the king. Well, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that they were to worship no one but the Lord. And so they refused to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. This infuriated the king, but he gave them another chance. Now listen as I read from Daniel 3 what these three young men told the king:

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:16-18).

That took plenty of courage. They did not know what the Lord would do. They might have died in that fiery furnace, and they were prepared to die. But you remember how the Lord spared them.

What those three young men did that day was not what you would expect if anyone else was put in that position. I am sure that the Lord gave them the grace to say what they said, leaving the outcome entirely in the Lord’s hands. So what did it show? It showed that they were confident that whatever the Lord did, would be right.

What do verses 116 and 117 tell us about the psalmist? Was he proud, self-confident, totally unafraid of his enemies? No, they tell us that he told his enemies that he was going to stand by the Word of God, and then he committed himself to the Lord for His strength to stand by what they

told their enemies that they were going to do.

Look at verse 116. The psalmist went back to the Lord in prayer, and said to the Lord, “Uphold me.” Lit. he was asking the Lord to prop him up. He was calling upon the Lord to let him lean upon Him. It was an admission that he could not continue to stand against his enemies until the Lord upheld him. It was an acknowledgment of his own weakness and need for strength.

In such a time as this we need to remember Isa. 40:31 and Eph. 6:10. The psalmist could have looked back at the life of Moses, and the strength that he manifested in going to Pharaoh again and again to demand that he let the Israelites go.

When the psalmist said, “Uphold me according unto thy Word,” he was undoubtedly taking strength from the promises of God because the Word not only tells us what the Lord wants us to do, but it tells us what He will do for us! And when he added, “Let me not be ashamed of my hope,” he was casting himself upon the Lord so that he would be able to abide by his decision to keep the Lord’s commandments.

But then look at verse 117. There again he said, “Hold thou me up.” This is a different word in the Hebrew, but it means basically the same thing. The psalmist was calling upon God to support him. We can do this when it is our intention to do God’s will. If the Lord would do this for the psalmist, he knew that he would be “safe.” And then the psalmist made a vow, made a promise, to the Lord. He said, “I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.” Answered prayer strengthens our faith to continue to trust the Lord.

In verses 118 and 119 we see how the psalmist received further strength by what he had learned about the Lord’s dealings with wicked people. He could have been thinking about the flood, or Sodom and Gomorrah, or even the conquest of the land of Canaan.

But he could also have be thinking about the future prophetically. Some day the Lord’s conflict with the Enemy and his henchmen will come to an end. The Lord will put them away eternally like dross removed from gold or silver when it is subjected to intense heat. It is wonderful to know that while the enemy may get the best of us in certain circumstances, like they did with Stephen, yet ultimately the victory will be the Lord’s, and it is

the best to be on His side.

Now we come to the last verse, 120. The psalmist knew that he was in himself no match for those who were against him. And, in a sense, he was afraid of them. But the One he really feared was the Lord. The one person whose approval he wanted was the Lord, and he himself did not want to fall under the judgments of the Lord.

Do you want to know what it means to fear the Lord, for us as the people of God to fear the Lord? It means that we would rather stand against the Devil and all of the forces of evil than to do a single thing that would be displeasing or dishonoring to the Lord. When the psalmist said that he trembled for fear of the Lord, he used a word which meant that it caused such emotion with him that it made the hairs on his head and neck stand straight up.

Concl: This experience of the psalmist has been duplicated many times over in the lives of the Lord's people throughout the years of time. And it will be illustrated again and again. When we respond to the Lord's ways with us, by His grace, with the greatest determination that we are going to please the Lord regardless of what the circumstances may be, it is to bring to us the greatest excitement and anticipation of seeing the blessing of the Lord in our lives. We can't do it by ourselves, but we can do all things through Christ who daily will provide us with His strength. May God enable all of us to be faithful to Himself day by day and moment by moment.