

## CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

Psalm 119:145-152

**Intro:** In 1 John 5:14 and 15 we have a very important couple of verses which have to do with prayer. Perhaps they are verses which you have committed to memory. But in case you haven't memorized them, this is what they tell us:

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (1 John 5:14-15).

Two important things need to be said about these verses, and I will introduce them as questions:

1) What does it mean to ask according to God's will?

2) Where do we find the will of God?

This is certainly not a promise that we can ask anything according to the will of God and expect to receive it regardless of how we are living. Asking according to the will of God means that we are seeking to live according to the will of God as well as asking according to His will. That is brought out in the words of our Lord found in John 15:7:

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

So we cannot ask according to the will of God unless we are living in the will of God.

But where do we find the will of God? There is only one place: we find it in the Word of God. Now obviously we do not have specific answers to every question we might have, but the Word gives us enough to know if our request is in keeping with what God would want to do for us.

Now both of these ideas are brought together in this nineteenth stanza of Psalm 119. Although the word "confidence" is not used, yet the whole stanza speaks of the confidence that the Psalmist had in the Lord, and in His Word. We don't know what his problem was, but his words indicate that his problem was both serious and urgent.

Confidence is another word for faith. It is a very important word where prayer is concerned. In many cases we have to admit that we do not know what the will of the Lord is, but then our confidence is the confidence that Abraham expressed in his prayer for Sodom when he declared, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Always our confidence

must be in the Lord. His will is not always clearly stated, but in such cases we keep on trusting the Lord to carry out His own will. Prayer and the Word of God are bound together in an inseparable union. Prayer must always be defined in terms of what God has revealed in His Word. We must say with the Psalmist, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa. 66:18). The psalmist knew this, and he made it very clear in this stanza. He was just as determined to keep the statutes as he was urgent in his call to the Lord for help. The inclination we all have is to be urgent in our prayer, but careless about the Word. We can be very prayerful about a need, but not as careful about living according to the statutes of the Lord.

However, having said all of that, we all know, or should know, that our obedience to the Word is never perfect. There are always ways in which we can be more obedient than we have been. Perhaps the Lord had been dealing with the psalmist about some inconsistency or disobedience in his life. The psalmist knew about this, but had not done nothing about it. Or perhaps he had told the Lord that he would do something about it, but time moved along and the psalmist had not done what he fully intended to do, but just had not gotten around to it. This trial was a reminder to him that he had some unfinished business to take care of with the Lord. This is the idea in verse 146. When the psalmist referred to the Word as the Lord's "testimonies," he was referring to the way in which the Word states very clearly about how the Lord wants us to live, along with warnings for a failure to abide by the Word. The psalmist was overlooking what God had clearly revealed about a godly life, while presenting his request for a matter that was not clearly indicated. But now the Lord was bringing the psalmist to act upon that part of God's will which is stated frank way. So there is evidence of progress that the Lord was making in the life of the psalmist.

But now let us move on to verse 147.

The psalmist did not mean by his words in this verse that he was able to prevent the dawning of a new day, but he meant that he was up before the dawn to lay his case before the Lord. He got up earlier than usual to bring his need before the Lord. Most of us will only get up early if we are forced to do so by certain circumstances. But the pressure that the psalmist was talking about here, was a pressure that he felt within his own heart. "And cried" means that he prayed, calling out to God with his request. And he was encouraged to do this because his hope was kept

alive and strengthened by the promises of the Word. There is something about our trials which makes us notice details in God's promises that we may have overlooked before. But here he was confident that it was well worth his while to get up early to be with the Lord.

It is stated in Mark 1:35 that this is what the Lord did, sometimes giving whole nights to prayer.

What had been the psalmist's practice before, we do not know. But he mentions this as though it was something different from the way he would usually begin the day. This is always a good time before the activities of the day begin. Usually it is a time when we can pray without any interruption. And it is a good habit to have of meeting with the Lord before meeting with anyone else, and to read His Word before we read anything else.

But this is not all that the psalmist did. According to verse 148 he did the same at night. The night was usually divided into certain "watches," which were sometimes used for defense, but here he refers to them as times when he could give himself to prayer, before the night watches. So he was beginning the day, and ending the day with the Lord.

One of the Puritans who was writing to encourage prayer without ceasing pointed to the burnt offering which the children of Israel were commanded to bring the first thing in the morning, and the last thing at night, and he said that this was a good practice to help us to pray also throughout the day. Perhaps this is what the psalmist meant, taking verse 147 and 148 together. He began the day with the Lord *and the Word*, and he ended the day with the Lord *and the Word*. What an excellent time to meditate on the Word, when the work of the day is over, and we can take some portion of Scripture to think about and to pray over before going to bed.

Now as we come to verse 149 we see that the psalmist was praying, not particularly about his problem, *but for himself*. And he was casting himself upon the "lovingkindness" of the Lord. This is that familiar OT word which is an attribute of God, the word *chesed*. It is often translated *mercy*. It indicates that the psalmist, with all of the praying that he had done, was totally unworthy of the blessing of the Lord, and that he himself needed to be quickened by the Lord, given fresh strength to do the will of God, leaving the outcome of his problem entirely in the Lord's hands. It was just like he was saying to the Lord, "Thy will be done." It

often takes time for us to come to this place, but we are not only seeing in this Psalm, the entire Psalm, not just this stanza, how the psalmist was seeking help from the Lord, but also how the Lord was working through the psalmist's trial to bring him into closer fellowship with Himself.

Note in verse 150 the the psalmist enemies were drawing near to do him harm. They had no regard for the law of the Lord. God was not in all their thoughts, and so neither was His Word. It is always the case that people who have no thoughts about God, will always not want to pay any attention to His Word. We see evidence of this in our world today, I am sorry to say. Believers are scorned when they cite God's Word in explaining why we take certain stands about abortion, or gay marriages, or justice.

Notice by comparing 150 and 151 that the enemy was drawing near, *but the Lord was already there*. Cf. Psa. 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength . . ." Also Heb. 13:5-6, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content . . ." How true God's Word is, and what comfort His commandments bring to our souls. As Derek Kidner said in commenting on these two verses, "The threat is not glossed over; it is put in perspective by a bigger fact" (II, 428).

And then we have one final word in verse 152.

The psalmist was not a novice. He had brought with him to his trial a background in the truth. And the reason that he kept speaking of the Word, and thinking about the Word, was because long before this particular trial came along, he knew that God had established His Word forever. God never misleads us by His Word. He never breaks His promises. And this present trial had been used by the Lord to strengthen his conviction in the unchanging and absolute reliability of the Word of God.

Barnes concluded his remarks on this stanza and with this last verse with these words:

"From" eternity, and "for" eternity. They were laid in the eternity past; they will continue in the eternity to come. They are based on eternal principles of right; they will never be changed. Such a conviction will do much to keep the soul steady and firm in the trials and uncertainties of life. Whatever may change, God's law does not change; whatever is new, that is not new; whatever will vanish away, that will remain.

Now this, like every other stanza in this Psalm, was written to strengthen our confidence in the Word of God, and to strengthen our confidence also in the God Who hears and answers prayer.

Adam Clarke had this to say concerning the Word of God:

They are of eternal truth, immutable and indispensable. And this is the anchor of our souls, that we may not be carried away by trials and temptations. Not one tittle of God's truth has ever failed any of his sincere followers. No one promise of his that has been sought by faith in Christ has ever been unfulfilled. Blessed be God!

And so may we be filled with confidence in prayer as we seek to do His will, and pray that our prayers will be answered according to His will.