

THE FRUIT OF THE WORD AND PRAYER

Psalm 119:169-176

Intro: We come tonight to the last stanza of this great psalm. Two things characterize this Psalm. The first is prayer. The second is the Word. And it can be stated as an axiom of the spiritual life, a self-evident truth, that the more we have of the one, the more we will have of the other. There is no other way to victory in our daily lives; there is no other path to blessing in the service of the Lord. The apostles stated how extremely important both the Word and prayer are when, as the work began to intensify in the early church, they sought the help of the deacons when they said, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). They were not minimizing the importance of ministering to the physical necessities of the people of God. But they had been taught by the Lord that nothing, not even good works, should be allowed to draw them away from the careful study of the Word of God, and prayer. And so they told the people of God, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

One wonderful result of such an attitude on the part of the leaders, is that the church soon learns to value the Word of God and prayer for their own lives. This was to be seen in some of the lives of the deacons who were appointed to help the apostles. With all of the activity that is going on in churches today, we have to confess that churches today are weak either in the ministry of the Word of God, or in prayer, or in both. And the true blessing of the Lord will not return to the church until we see how essential for all of us are the Word of God and prayer.

We might think that when we got to the final stanza of this great Psalm that the psalmist would be “prayed out,” or that he had learned everything from Scripture that it was possible to learn. But instead we find that, if anything, his praying has become more intense, and his delight in the Word of God more obvious.

And this is the way that it should be with us. And it will be if we realize how absolutely indispensable the Word of God and prayer are to godly living and godly service. The evidence of both of these will be seen in public, but, as we have been learning from our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, both prayer and our understanding of the truth of God’s Word, are primarily personal matters which have their foundation in our private and

personal relationship with the Lord. No child of God can survive and grow in the world as it is today without spending much time in the Word and in prayer.

And so instead of finding great self-satisfaction in himself, it is clear from this last stanza that the psalmists desire for the Word, a desire expressed in continued prayer, is just as strong, or even stronger, that we have seen it in the preceding stanzas. The more we pray, the more we are going to want to pray. And the more we pray, the more we are going to realize our continuing need to pray.

In the same way it can be said, the more we give ourselves to the Word, the more we are going to want to give ourselves to the Word. And the more we give ourselves to the Word, the more we are going to realize how much we need the Word.

So the fruit of the Word of God and prayer, is a growing hunger for more of the Word of God and prayer. On the other hand, when we begin to neglect our Bibles, and to neglect praying, the more apparent it will be that we are declining spiritually, and, unfortunately, the more we will be content to live without giving prayer and the Word the place in our lives that they ought to have.

So the Psalm ends as it began – with prayer and the Word. But it is not always the same kind of prayer. Usually the requests are personal, applying to the psalmist himself. But sometimes there is praise. Often intercession. Many times, as in the very last verse, confession. It would be a very profitable exercise for all of us, to come back to this Psalm frequently, to read it from beginning to end at one sitting, and perhaps even more than once. The more this Psalm becomes a Psalm that we can pray from our own hearts, the more we will understand why the psalmist found such great delight in both the Word of God and prayer.

But now let us examine the stanza verse by verse. If you have a copy of the NIV, you will see how they recognize that the first five verses of this final stanza are all requests.

In verse 169 we detect the psalmist's feeling of unworthiness to come before the Lord in prayer. This feeling should always be present in our prayers. Let us realize that in coming to the Lord, Jehovah, we are coming to the Lord, the eternal God, One Who is infinitely holy and Who

cannot look upon sin – we are coming to Him Who made us and Who has redeemed us. It takes time for us to come to an understanding of how unworthy we are in ourselves to approach the living God. It took Jacob twenty years before we hear him telling the Lord,

10 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant ... (Gen. 32:10a).

When the Lord called Moses when he was down in the land of Midian to return to Egypt to deliver the people of Israel, Moses' response to God was, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). As far as the evidence in Scripture is to be seen, we can say that it took forty years before Moses was addressing the Lord that way.

We see the same in David. He wanted to build a house for the Lord to dwell in. But the Lord did not allow him to do that. Instead, the Lord said that He would build David a house, speaking of how his family would be the royal family of Israel. And David's response was, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou has brought me hitherto?" (2 Sam. 7:18).

Here in our text, in verse 169, the psalmist prayed, "Let my cry come near before Thee, O Lord." He was not demanding that the Lord hear him, but simply asking the Lord to let his cry "come near" so that the Lord could hear what he was saying. He was saying this in the same way that Esther approached her husband, the king, since she had not been called to come to him.

But what was his request here? "Give me understanding according to Thy Word." With all he knew, he wanted to know more. But he did not just want any kind of understanding; he wanted the understanding which is according to the Word, that is, the wisdom of God in contrast with the wisdom of men. Cf. verses 34, 73, and 144. It shows that the psalmist was spiritually hungry, eager to know the Word of God. His "cry" here is a shout of joy in anticipation of God's answer.

But we have another request in verse 170.

What is a "supplication"? It is simply his request, his petition. He earnestly sought the Lord's help in grace, not because he deserved it, but because he needed it. It is as though he was knocking at the door of

heaven, seeking the Lord's help. He was not pushing the door open, but knocking and speaking for the Lord to hear.

As I have said, we do not know just how much of the Word of God had been committed to writing at this time, but whatever it was, even by the mouth of the prophets, the psalmist was very much aware of the promises that God had given that He would hear and deliver His people in their times of need. This is one of many passages in which we are taught that the Lord loves for us to remind Him of His Word, not that He needs any reminder, but because He knows we come in faith and are familiar with what He has promised that He would do.

In verse 171 we learn that answered prayer produces praise, especially when that answered prayer has to do with understanding and guidance which is given to us from the Word. But often we are like the nine lepers who were cured of their leprosy, but, as far as we know, never returned to give our Lord the thanks for what He had done for them. Cf. Luke 17:17.

Psa. 50:23 is a wonderful verse on praise, and one of the main conditions of answered prayer: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God."

On verse 172 Spurgeon said, "When he had done singing he began preaching." Both are very necessary, but they both follow answered prayer.

Psalm 66 was not one of David's Psalms, but it reflects what the writer of Psalm 119 is saying here in this last stanza. Let me read to you Psa. 66:16-20

16 Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

17 I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue.

18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

19 But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer.

20 Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

The simple lesson of these verses is that first we must pray. Then we wait on the Lord. We make sure that no iniquity is in our hearts. God hears

and answers. And then we praise Him.

Perhaps one of the reasons we don't praise more than we do is because we don't pray more than we do. And perhaps our prayers are hindered because of some disobedience, or some "disobediences," in our lives. The conclusion of verse 172 indicates that the psalmist had not only turned to the commandments of the Lord, but had obeyed them, and he was thoroughly convinced that they were the personification of righteousness. They were not just righteous, but righteousness. And they produce righteousness in our lives. There can be no practical righteousness apart from the commandments of Scripture.

In verse 173 the Psalmist cried out for the personal intervention of the Lord. Often the Lord uses other instruments, but in this case, and perhaps more so the better we know the Lord, we like to see His hand intervening in our behalf. When the magicians of Egypt could no longer duplicate the plagues that the Lord brought upon Egypt, you will remember that they told Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). If God could do all of that with just a finger, think of what He could do if He brought His whole hand into action.

We don't obligate the Lord to us by obeying His Word. Nevertheless He has promised over and over in His Word that doing His will is one of the main conditions for answered prayer. Out of all of the many choices that he had before him, the psalmist had deliberately chosen the precepts of God.

There are two possible interpretations of verse 174. One, he could have been thinking of seeing God's deliverance from whatever trouble was upon him as he wrote this stanza. **Or**, he could have been speaking of the fulfillment of all of the glorious prospects involved in our salvation. It is not improbable that he was thinking of both. When trouble comes, we long to get out of it. But when we consider all of the troubles that we have in this life, doesn't it make us long for the Lord, and for heaven, and for glory? Of course it does!

And so in verse 175 we have the fourth and last "Let" of this stanza. He was praying that he would experience here and now the blessings of the life of the redeemed, eternal life. He wanted to experience the fulness of joy that only the Lord could give, and day by day he expected to be helped, and strengthened, and guided by the judgments of the Word. Are

there “heights of joy” that we often sing about that we are presently not experiencing? Are our souls really living out the life that we have in Christ? The word “let” indicates in all four cases where this word is used that the Lord really is in control, and He orders our circumstances to draw us closer and closer to Himself.

The closing verse of this stanza, and of the whole Psalm, at first reading seems to be a little out of place. But as you think about it, you can see that it really belongs here. It shows the effect of prayer and the Word in his life. We never completely forget the sins of the past. At the time, we may have blamed others, or even blamed God. But in a life so filled with prayer and the Word as the psalmist’s life was, and we look back over the past, we see that we have no one to blame but ourselves. “I have gone astray like a lost sheep.”

Now I have never been a shepherd, and so all that I know about sheep is what I have learned from reading, or from what others have told me. But I understand that it is characteristic of a sheep that has gone astray, that it goes farther and farther away. It doesn’t usually find its way back home, like a dog or a cat might do. One writer says that our going astray was “often, willfully, wantonly, and even hopelessly” were it not for God’s intervening and redeeming grace.

But the psalmist was not only a sheep, but he was a servant. And so he called upon the great Shepherd of the sheep, his Lord and his Master, to “seek” him – which the Lord is always doing even without being asked. But it delights Him to be asked. What a day of discovery it is when we accept full responsibility for our sins, and turn to the Lord for our salvation.

But what is even better, and a great safeguard against further departures is in the last statement of this Psalm: “For I do not forget Thy commandments.”

Let me go back to what I said earlier about reading the Word. The more we read it, the more we love it, and the more we love it, the better we understand it. One of the main purposes of the Word is to keep us from going astray like lost sheep. May He always keep seeking us, and may we be always so acquainted with the commandments of Scripture, both the positive ones and the negative ones, that we see how God uses His Word in our hearts to keep us from going astray.