

July 25, 2010

Day Four

As in many of the Psalms, in the next section, the psalmist is reflecting on the trouble he is facing. Read Psalm 119:145-152.

In the opening two verses of this section, the psalmist is making a specific request of God. What does he want? What is he asking?

As the thought in the stanza transitions from a plea for help, to what does the psalmist turn? What becomes the focus of verses 149-152?

Is the psalmist sure that the Lord will aid and rescue him? Why?

This idea of rescue is seen in the next section as well. Read Psalm 119:153-160.

What refrain returns repeatedly in this section? (See 119:154, 156, and 159.)

What is it that the psalmist desires from God?

In verses 156 and 157 the same word appears in both verses, but it may not be evident in your English translation. God's mercy is "great," and the psalmist's enemies are "great" (or, as sometimes translated, "many"). It could appear to the psalmist (or to any of us in the midst of difficulty!) that we are caught between two great (and equal?) powers. But is that the case? How does the psalmist see the resolution of this tension?

Read back over 119:137-160. What is the connection between the psalmist's plea for help, his assurance it will come, the word of God, and the character of God?

Day Five

We come to the closing stanzas of this great psalm. Read Psalm 119:161-176.

As we listen to these closing words, how would you summarize the character of the praying reflected in 119:161-168. How is the psalmist speaking to God?

Although this section is prayer, the psalmist is not specifically asking God to do something. What facet of praying is reflected here?

As we turn to the final section of this Psalm, verses 169-176, we again hear the psalmist's requests. What kinds of things does he ask of God?

In the first two verses of this section, the psalmist is asking for God's grace and assistance "according to Your word" (119:169-170). Why is that "qualifier" so significant?

Look at the very closing line of this marvelous Psalm.

What does the psalmist recognize about himself?

What does the psalmist long for God to do?

How does the psalmist see this in connection to God's revelation?

What has stirred you most deeply as you have journeyed through this Psalm over the past two weeks? What is it that you want God to do in your heart?

Psalms:

Turning Down the Noise

July 25, 2010

Day One

Have you ever watched children at play . . . and begun to feel the joy they are experiencing creeping into your own heart? It's hard to *not* get caught up in their delighted play if you watch long enough. A smile creeps onto your face, you remember your own times of joy, and subtly but surely you begin to feel the delight again.

That can happen as we listen in on the praying of the psalmist. Although we might not immediately feel what he is feeling or sense what he is aware of, as we give attention to what is really going on in the Psalms, we might just find ourselves beginning to get carried along in the flow of the Spirit that shapes the psalmist's words.

We've been in Psalm 119, and we continue this week; trying to enter into and taste the delight the psalmist has in God's rich communication. Recall that this Psalm is broken into 22 stanzas where each stanza has a heading of a single Hebrew letter (in alphabetical order) and each verse in that stanza begins with a word that starts with that letter. This Psalm--this prayer--is purposeful, thoughtful, and rich. Let's keep reading it that way.

Read Psalm 119: 89-96.

What is the tension described by the psalmist between what he is experiencing with others and what he knows to be true?

How does this build on ideas that we looked at earlier in this Psalm?

Weekly Devotional



This stanza of eight verses seems to have two halves; each half begins with the same Hebrew word (although it is hard to reflect this in most English translations). 119:89 begins with “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed . . .”; while 119:93 reads “Forever I will not forget your precepts . . .” What two things does this emphasis on “without end” touch on? What does the psalmist insist will be never ending?

The last verse presents a bit of a challenge, suggesting that the psalmist can find a limit to “perfection” (119:96). But that word can mean complete or finished; it does not always convey the sense of absolute perfection we associate with God. Apparently, the psalmist *can* see the end of *man’s* “perfection”; that is, man’s complete and full end. What does he recognize about that?

The next stanza takes a different tack than any up to this point. There are no laments in this stanza, nor are there any requests. Read 119:97-104.

What characterizes this stanza? What is on the psalmist’s heart?

As the psalmist expresses his delight in God’s communication, he rehearses some of the things God’s word does for him. Which of the things that the psalmist touches on in 119:97-104 can you identify with? Why?

Day Two

As we continue to find ourselves in the imagery and language of the psalmist, let’s turn to the next three stanzas. Read Psalm 119:105-112.

In this stanza, notice the metaphorical language the psalmist uses to describe his relationship to God’s words; he makes reference to his “feet” (119:105), his “hands” (119:109), and his “heart” (119:111). What do you think the psalmist is seeking to convey with this language?

When the psalmist speaks of God’s word being his “heritage” (119:111), he is using language reminiscent of God’s promise to give Israel a land and a future. What is conveyed in speaking of God’s word this way?

In contrast to his delight in what God has communicated, the psalmist also expresses other sentiments--as is clear in the next stanza. Read 119:113-120.

What reason(s) does the psalmist offer for resisting and opposing the “evildoers”?

How is this opposition rooted in the psalmist’s understanding of God’s revelation? Does he oppose those who are evil because they “break the rules” or for some other reason?

In the next stanza, the psalmist in some sense compares and contrasts himself with those who do evil. What contrasts do you see in Psalm 119:121-128?

Pay particular attention to 119:124-125. Upon what basis does the psalmist believe that God will deal beneficently with him?

Why is it critical to grasp this insight?

Day Three

Some words we come across in our English Bibles may not immediately convey the sense of the underlying Hebrew word, in spite of the quality of the translation. That is because the English word may, in fact, mean just what the Hebrew word means but *we read the word with a nuance that might obscure the meaning*. A great example comes in the opening line of the next section. Read Psalm 119:129-136.

Here the psalmist declares that God’s “testimonies” are “wonderful” (119:129). What comes to mind when you think of “wonderful”?

We often use this word to refer to something that really impresses us; and that is a legitimate way to understand the word. But the Hebrew word choice seems to convey a different sense of “wonderful”; that which really is “a wonder” (i.e., something amazing, supernatural, unexpectedly and surprisingly powerful). Reread 119:129-136 with an awareness that the psalmist is speaking of the “wonder” (amazing supernatural power) of God’s word. How does being aware of that sense shape the way you grasp what the psalmist is saying?

What does the psalmist understand to be some of the “wonder” that this communication from God accomplishes in his life?

How do you experience, in your own journey with God, the things the psalmist speaks of here?

Read the next stanza; Psalm 119:137-144. What word(s) or idea(s) stand out to you?

The first verse opens with a word that begins the last verse of this section; the word is “righteous.” The word means that which is right, ethically sound and pure, vindicated and just. What, in the eyes of the psalmist is “righteous”?

What does the psalmist understand about God’s righteousness as reflected in 119:142?

What does seeing God, and His words, in this light do for the psalmist? What stirs in his heart as he reflects on both God’s righteousness and the righteousness of God’s words?