

God's Goodness and The Blessings of Affliction

Psalm 119:65-72

Introduction: 1) The wonderful preacher John Phillips is helpful when he says, “The constant gnawing of adverse circumstances can wear down even the most committed believer. Yet, as the constant washing of the waters smooths the pebbles and the constant wearing of sand rounds the ragged edges of even the roughest rocks, so the unremitting adversities of the psalmist were doing their work of polishing and refining his soul.” (*Exploring Psalms*, 321).

2) Our good God only does good things for his servants (vv. 17, 23, 38, 49, 65). Indeed, the Hebrew word for “good” (*tob*) occurs 6 times and begins 5 lines of this stanza (Van Gemeren, *Psalms*, EBC, 871). It is the dominant idea that ties these 8 verses together. However, sometimes those good things from our good God flow in the purifying waters of “affliction” (vv.67, 71). They may not feel good, but they are good for us. Our prayer to the Lord should be that of the psalmist, “It is good for me that I was afflicted” (v. 71). Why this is so is laid out for us in 4 movements in verses 65 – 72.

I. God keeps His Word to His Servant

119:65

- The psalmist begins stanza Teth, the 9th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with a confession of confidence and trust: “you have dealt well with your

servant.” The phrase “dealt well” is the Hebrew word *tob* and is translated “good” in the *CSB* and *NIV*. And who is the one who has been good to his servant? It is the Lord (Yahweh) and he has been good to his servant “according to [his] word.” The Lord is good to his faithful servant just as he promises.

- Spurgeon says it so well, “This kindness of the Lord is, however, no chance matter: he promised to do so, and he has done it according to his word. It is very precious to see the word of the Lord fulfilled in our happy experience; it endears the Scripture to us, and makes us love the Lord of the Scripture. The book of providence tallies with the book of promise: what we read in the page of inspiration we meet with again in the leaves of our life-story” (*TOD*, vol 3, 270).
- Our good God keeps his good word to his servant. That is one thing you can always count on.

II. A good God uses affliction to lead us to obedience to His Word

119:66-68

- Verses 66-68 begin and end with a prayer. Both prayers are a petition for the Lord to teach his servants his word. The word is identified in these verses as judgment, knowledge, commandments (v.66), word (v. 67) and statutes

(v.68). This word is good (v. 66) and finds its source in a good God who does good (v.68).

- The psalmist asks the Lord to “teach me good judgment and knowledge.” Grant me wisdom and insight that I might make good and wise decisions. The psalmist is confident in his request because he is committed to the Lord; he believes in the Lord’s commandments. The word of God is a fountain of wisdom and knowledge and he wants that fountain flowing in his life.
- Verse 67 informs us that from personal experience the psalmist knows the pain many of us do of wandering away, going “astray” from God’s word. Note the honest acknowledgement of his sin, “I went astray.” I did this to myself. God, however, is a good Father who lovingly disciplines his children when they get off the right path (see Heb. 12:5-13). He may even use affliction, pain, suffering, difficulties as the rod of his chastisement. Kidner speaks of affliction as “bitter medicine” (*Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 426). It does not taste good, but it has a good result. For the psalmist that is quite clear. “Now I keep your word” he says, as a result of being afflicted (v. 67). Now I know “You are good (in essence) and do good (in action).” Therefore I ask you again, “O Lord, teach me your statutes.” Be my divine instructor. Discipline was not pleasant, but it brought your servant back to the place of obedience. So Lord, give me more. More of you. More of your word.

III. The arrogant will tempt us to disregard God's Word

119:69-70

- The devil has plenty of people, in and out of the church, who are more than willing to do his dirty work. The psalmist experienced this up close and personal in the form of lies and false accusations. In verse 69 he tells us, “The arrogant have smeared me with lies.” *The Message* reads, “The godless spread lies about me.” The idea is the insolent or prideful have “patched together a lie against him” (Ross, 524). The actions of these arrogant liars stands in striking contrast to the good God who does good. Therefore the psalmist will not compromise his loyalty and allegiance to God. Rather, the arrogant drive him to the Lord with this confession and resolve, “I will obey your precepts with all my heart” (v.69).
- The prideful have no conscience, no genuine sense of right and wrong. “Their hearts are hard and insensitive.” There is nothing in them that longs for God and his Word. When it comes to the Lord, they don't care. When it comes to telling the truth, they don't care. When it comes to obeying God they don't care. Again, in striking contrast to the prideful, the Psalmist professes his affections for both God and his word: “but I delight in your law” (v. 70). *The Message* says, “I dance to the tune of your revelation.”
- Lying about others is a serious issue in the eyes of our God. If you are tempted to think it is not a big deal hear the warning of Rev. 21:8, “But the

cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Pretty bad company. A very awful destiny.

IV. God’s people acknowledge that the pain of affliction helps us refocus on

God’s Word

119:71-72

- The last two verses of stanza Teth are what I call “heart verses.” They are verses we would do well to memorize and mediate on. Verse 71 speaks of the value of afflictions. Verse 72 speaks of the value of the word of God.
- James Boice says verse 71, “is an exact equivalent of Romans 8:28” (*Living by the Book*, 71). There the Bible says, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” The Psalmist and Paul are in perfect agreement. “It is good for me that I was afflicted.” There was profit in my pain. Why? How? Because through it I learn better God’s word. I learn more about who God is and who I am. I learn better how God works and what he is doing in my life. Paul again adds a valuable insight when he writes in 2 Cor. 4:17, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”
- Verse 72 gives us the Psalmist’s opinion of the value of God’s Word. It is pretty impressive. Let’s break it down.

- “The Law of your mouth.” The Bible is the very breath and word coming from God’s mouth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).
 - “Is better to me.” This is my personal evaluation of the Word of God and its value and importance. It is good (*tob*). Others may disagree (v. 69-70), but this is what I think.
 - “Than thousands of gold and silver pieces.” The Bible is priceless. No words in the human language can capture the value and worth that it is to me.
- Spurgeon provides a nice summation: “It is a sure sign of a heart which has learned God’s statutes when it prizes them above all earthly possessions” (274). Stack up all the gold and silver you can find. I would gladly walk away from it all for the priceless treasure that is the Word of God.

Conclusion: 1) Pain and suffering is an inescapable reality. Everyone will experience it. Even Jesus. As the quintessential “Suffering Servant of the Lord” (Isa. 53) he was afflicted not for his own sins but for ours. His suffering took him through a series of lies, insults and beatings culminating in a Roman cross. Yet through it all He would say to you and me, “The Lord has dealt well with his servant. I delight in God’s law and it was good that I was afflicted.” Good you say? Yes! Look at what my afflictions accomplished!

2) If we even doubt that good can come out of pain and suffering, and sometimes we will, we need only to turn our eyes to the cross. The greatest affliction. The greatest good.