

Psalm 119:145-152 (KOPH)

The Believer's Cry

I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD – v. 145

Spurgeon provides a very good analysis of this section of Psalm 119 by referring to it as the Psalmist's memories of prayer. The analysis makes sense when you consider that everything is in the past tense. The psalmist is remembering how he cried with his whole heart and how he prevented (or preceded) the dawning of the morning with his cries. Spurgeon notes that *He who has been with God in the closet will find God with him in the furnace.*

He then breaks down the Psalm by noting how this section shows us regarding the psalmist: How he prayed (Ps 119:145). What he prayed for (Ps 119:146). When he prayed (#Ps 119:147). How long he prayed (Ps 119:148). What he pleaded (#Ps 119:149). What happened (#Ps 119:150). How he was rescued (Ps 119:151). What was his witness as to the whole matter (Ps 119:152).

If you remember what we have noted often that this Psalm is a Psalm about God's Word then you could also draw a number of lessons from this section about the connection between our praying and the word of God. There needs to be a connection if we're going to pray right and if we're going to pray in the will of God {see vv. 145-147}.

What I want to call your attention to this morning, however, is the single word that is found in the first 3 verses of this section and occurs nowhere else outside of this section except for one time in v. 169. I want to focus on the Psalmist's cry. {note the occurrences cf. v. 169}.

James tell us in his epistle that it is *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much* (James 5:16). It is this fervency, I believe, that is captured by the word *cry*. There is more to this term, in other words, than a simple and casual coming to God in prayer. And I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with the simplicity of prayer in which we calmly and reverently bring our petitions to God. But on the other hand when the spiritual battles we face press upon our souls and when the awful spiritual condition of our country comes to mind and when our deep longings for God grip our hearts then there needs to be fervency in our praying – we need to cry to God.

I'm reminded of Christ's call for fervent prayer when he and Peter, James, and John came down from the mount where Christ had been transfigured and when they reached the plain they encountered a commotion. There was a distraught Father whose son was possessed by a demon and the Christ's disciples had been unable to cast it out. Christ then does what his powerless disciples could not do – he casts out the demon and a short time later his disciples approach him and want to know why they couldn't cast it out. And then we read in Mk. 9:29 *And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

I don't want to divert your attention from our study by going into the meaning of fasting except to say that I believe that fasting, properly done, becomes a means to boosting a Christian's fervency in his praying. He's able to redirect physical hunger pangs into spiritual longings so that whatever hunger pangs he feels become messengers to his soul that preach to him about the need to see God move.

Let's look at the Psalmist's cry then and see it, not just as his own cry but see it, rather as the true Christian's cry. And if you find yourself, like so many Christians today, really not knowing all that much about fervency in your praying then you'll want to learn from the Psalmist this morning so that you may emulate him more in your own praying. If prayer itself is a neglected exercise (and I fear it is) then fervency in prayer is that much more lacking.

Let's look at the psalmist's cry, then, with this aim in view that:

We Will Make the Psalmist's Cry Our Own Cry Before the Lord

I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD... I cried unto thee; save me... I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried (vv. 145-147). If you would make the Psalmist's cry your own cry then you must understand first of all:

I. What Such a Cry Means

The literal meaning of the term *cry* is to call or to call out and most often the Hebrew word is translated that way. The fact, however, that this call is something that involves the whole heart gives rise to a more intensified English word – *to cry*.

Underlying this term is a sense of a deep and urgent need. If you were to drive home this afternoon and come across a stranded motorist who needed mechanical help you might help that motorist by making a call for a mechanic or a tow truck. But if you came across an accident in which people were seriously injured your call to 911 would be more urgent. Your heart would be racing and your voice would be trembling and your sense of the need would be heightened to where your call, being governed by need and urgency would intensify to a cry for help.

We find an example of such a cry in Mt. 14 where the disciples see Christ walking across the stormy sea. At first they're afraid because they think they're seeing a spirit and we read in v. 26 that *they cried out in fear*. When the Lord, then, identifies himself to his frightened disciples Peter poses a challenge to Christ by saying to him – *if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water*. You know the story – Peter climbs over the side of the boat and begins to walk on the water toward the Lord. He makes it until he is distracted by the boisterous wind and then begins to sink. And from the immediate and urgent need of a man about to drown we read in v. 30 that *he cried, saying, Lord, save me*.

Do you see how it's an immediate and urgent need that elevates a call into a cry? Now it doesn't always have to be an immediate emergency that leads to a cry. It can be, instead, a

deep sense of need that you are at first not even aware of but eventually wake up to. And once you are awakened to the need you bear a burden that becomes so great that it leads to a cry. And this cry may arise from personal need or it may arise from a wider sense of need. The spiritual and moral condition of our country today should compel us to cry to the Lord. In the course of the 119th Psalm we have seen examples of the Psalmist crying by what's taking place around him and we find him crying out of a sense of his own personal need.

I think it is from this sense of personal need that we find him crying to God in this section of Psalm 119. When we see him, for example, crying to God to be saved in v. 146 and when we see him praying to be quickened in v. 149 I think it would be fair to say that the need that gives rise to his cry is the need for revival in his own heart – the need for present day salvation power to reach his heart.

And would you notice that once such a burden grips his heart, he can't escape it. He must cry to the Lord and he will cry continually. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried he says in v. 147.

A true believer, you see, may go for a time without being dissatisfied with his lack of spiritual vitality. He goes about his business routinely without really noticing that his spiritual carelessness has cost him anything. Like Samson, in the book of Judges, there's a sense in which the Spirit has left him but he doesn't even know. It may take a moment of crisis to awaken him to the awful reality that he's spiritually barren but once he does become awakened to the consequences of his carelessness then he cries out to the Lord for the Lord's quickening power to make him alive to the things of God again.

The Psalmist's cry, then, presupposes an awareness of deep need. Christians can only go so long being oblivious to the power and presence of Christ. Eventually their carelessness will catch up to them and they won't find it easy to be satisfied in life until the Lord returns to them. So the Psalmist's presupposes a deep sense of need but his cry also engulfs his whole heart and springs from his whole heart.

Note again the words of v. 145 *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD*. I could spend a lot of time blowing the trumpet against half hearted religion this morning. It's very common, I'm afraid we're all too familiar with it and it very often springs from affluence and ease and worldliness among the people of God. Do you wonder, believer, why the Lord at times seems so far from you? Do you wonder why your prayers seem to go unanswered. The cause may very well be in your half-heartedness. The Lord's word through the prophet Jeremiah is that *ye shall seek me, and find [me], when ye shall search for me with all your heart* (Jer 29:13).

We know from James' epistle that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8) and that such a man should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. And a double minded man really amounts to a man with double allegiance springing from his heart.

I'm borrowing a quote from this afternoon's message now because it fits so well our present consideration. This is from JFB commentary on Zephaniah: *If Satan have half the heart, he will have all; if the Lord have but half offered to Him, He will have none.* There's no such thing as a half-hearted cry to the Lord. You can and sadly often times do find half-hearted praying but it's pretty hard to envision half-hearted crying. Crying, by its very nature involves the whole heart. Listen to the words of Thomas Brooks on this matter. He writes:

God looks not at the elegancy of your prayers, to see how neat they are; nor yet at the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers, to see how many they are; nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers; but at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are. There is no prayer acknowledged, approved, accepted, recorded, or rewarded by God, but that wherein the heart is sincerely and wholly engaged.

May we hear Christ himself saying to us this morning the words of Prov. 23:26 *My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.*

So if we're going to make the Psalmist's cry our own cry then we need first to understand what it means to cry. It means to have your whole heart engaged and it springs from a sense of deep and urgent need. But we must move now from the meaning of a cry to the content of such a cry. If you would make the Psalmist's cry your own then you must know next:

II. What Such a Cry Seeks

The first verse in this section indicates to us that the cry of the heart of the Psalmist was for an audience with God. *I cried with my whole heart: hear me, O LORD.* Here is the thing, then, that he desires with all his heart. He desires to be heard and not just heard but heard favorably. We can cross reference this verse with Ps. 61:1 to see the meaning. *Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.*

What such a cry amounts to is the regaining of a privilege that was lost when man rebelled against God and fell into sin. It hasn't always been the case that man had to cry to God to be heard. In the garden of Eden he was heard. Before falling into sin Adam enjoyed close communion with God in daily walks in the garden in the cool of the day.

But with his fall into sin such a privilege was lost. Our shorter catechism asks the question: What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell? And the answer begins this way: *All mankind by their fall lost communion with God...* It is rightfully called by the authors of our catechism an estate of misery. We become miserable if we're not communing with God. We were created, you see, to commune with God. This was our privilege and our blessing but it has been lost through sin. Now in salvation this privilege is regained but it doesn't exist now the way it once did or the way it one day will.

We can and should commune with God as Christians but you know very well in your own experience what the Psalmist demonstrates for us in this verse. There are times when

the Lord seems far away. There are times when you come away with the feeling that the heavens are as brass and that your prayers don't ascend any higher than the ceiling. Usually it's our own spiritual negligence that leads to this feeling and when it happens your desires intensify for such communion to be restored.

This was certainly Job's desire during the time of his affliction. *Oh that I knew where I might find him! [that] I might come [even] to his seat!* (Job 23:3). God was never far from Job but Job teaches us that during times of deep and prolonged trials and distress God seems as far away from us as the stars are from the earth. And when he feels as far away as the end of the universe at a time that you need him most then life becomes unbearable. It is during such times especially that we need to make the Psalmist's cry our own and cry to God with all our hearts that we may be heard and that God will attend to our prayers.

If you can settle for something less then you're probably not really a Christian. You don't miss communion with God because you can't miss something that you never really possessed. To those who have been given the Spirit of adoption whereby they cry Abba, Father, they know the blessing of such communion and they can't go long without having such a blessing restored if it's lost for a season.

So that's the first thing that the Psalmist's cry seeks – a favorable audience with God. The next thing he seeks is given to us in v. 146 *I cried unto thee; save me.* It might seem on the surface of these words that such a cry is superfluous. Isn't this the cry of an unsaved sinner? Is the Psalmist coming across to us as one who is not saved? The answer is not at all – when the Psalmist calls on God to save him he is calling on him to make salvation the power in his life that it has been in the past.

I've referred to Rom. 1:16 often as a key verse to teach us that the power of the gospel is an ongoing power. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ* Paul writes in that verse *for it is the power of God unto salvation.* Note that it IS the power of God – not that it was the power of God or that it will be the power of God, it IS the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

This is what the Psalmist is crying for then – the power of the gospel – the power that transforms our lives through the knowledge of Christ's dying love – the power that enables you to die more and more to sin and live more and more to God – the power that enables you to reign in life so that no matter what life throws at you, you are enabled to rise above it and be more than a conqueror.

Apart from this power we become spiritual zombies. I actually looked up that word *zombie* to see if it was an appropriate word for what I'm trying to convey. Listen to this definition of the term: *an offensive term for a person considered to lack energy, enthusiasm, or the ability to think independently.* Isn't that a fitting term to describe what we become apart from gospel power? We do lack energy and enthusiasm for Christ. We lose our zeal for his glory and more or less go through the motions of life like those that are practically brain-dead.

How we need to be saved again when we lose the power – or how we need to be saved again when sin seems to gain a dominion over us that it's not suppose to have. How we need to be saved again when we become prayerless and our hearts become cold toward God and toward the plight of lost souls.

In close connection to this petition for the Lord to save is the recurrence of another petition we've seen a number of times now. Verse 149 *Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.* There's not a lot of difference between this petition and the petition a couple of verse earlier for the Lord to save. Both convey the heart cry of one who wants to be alive to God. Both convey the heart cry of one who cannot stand dead religion.

If you would make the Psalmist's cry your cry, then, you must engage in prayer with all your heart to be heard of God and to be saved so that you're revived in the life transforming power of the gospel. So we've seen what a cry is – we've seen what this cry seeks. In closing let me encourage you to make the Psalmist's cry your cry before the Lord by pointing out to you:

III. Where This Cry Leads

In v. 145 we see that the Psalmist's cry to be heard leads to a strong resolution to obey. *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD:* There's his cry and his desire. There follows his resolution or his pledge: *I will keep thy statutes.* A similar resolution occurs in the next verse – verse 146 *I cried unto thee; save me,* and then the resolution *and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

Now it's important to keep in mind that the Psalmist is not trying to bargain with God. He is not pledging his obedience as a part of a deal he makes with God as it to suggest that if you'll hear me, then I'll obey or if you'll save me then I'll keep your testimonies. That kind of interpretation of the verses runs completely contrary to gospel. God gives freely or God doesn't give at all. And the reason God gives freely is because Christ has earned the blessings we seek.

Based on Christ's merit we can have hope for a favorable audience with God. And based on Christ's merit we can have hope that salvation will be applied to us and we'll know it's quickening power. Notice what it says in v. 147 *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.* Do you see where the Psalmist's hope lies? It doesn't lie in the hope that God will accept some offer of the Psalmist to obey if God will hear his prayer, his hope lies rather in the promises of God.

In close connection with this is the Psalmist's petition in v. 149 *Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness.* And again the Psalmist grounds his petitions in God's love, and mercy, or his covenant loyalty which is the literal meaning of lovingkindness. He doesn't ask to be heard in accordance with his pledge to keep God's statutes and testimonies but he wants to be heard in accordance with God's faithfulness.

The Psalmist is aware, however, that when God hears his prayers favorably and when God grants his desire for quickening power it will lead to the Psalmist's heart being filled with praise and thanksgiving and praise and thanksgiving will become the driving force behind his resolution to keep God's testimonies. The Psalmist, in other words, will love God because God first loved him and in that love there will spring up from his heart stronger resolve to follow after the Lord in the ways that are pleasing to the Lord and are becoming to the character of the Lord.

This is where the cry of the believer will or should always lead. Indeed it is this way that the Spirit of God works in the believer to will and to do of God's good pleasure. It is God's love freely given by his word and Spirit and grounded in his covenant loyalty that will compel you to follow hard after God.

So the Psalmist's cry, in the way I've described, leads to strengthened resolution to obey. Now it's interesting to note in this section of the Psalm that two things are mentioned that draw near to the Psalmist. Verse 150 *They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.* You can be sure that when you cry to God the devil and his hosts and those that perhaps unwittingly to his work will be near at hand to lure you away from God, and to seek to plant doubts and fears and misgivings in your mind about God and about your circumstances.

But note in the next verse that it is not only the mischief makers, so to speak, that draw near but v. 151 *Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth.* Isn't this what is ultimately behind our cries to God? We long for his presence. We long for him to draw near. We know that all is well if God is near. We draw security and assurance in his nearness. We become fearful and insecure in his absence.

So the Psalmist's cry leads to strong resolutions to walk in the obedience of faith. The Psalmist's cry leads to spiritual conflict as those that are far from God's law draw near. But thank God the Psalmist's cry, and hence your cry, also leads to victory for when God draws near and his presence becomes a felt reality in your heart then your confidence in God and in the promises of God enables you to mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not grow weary or to walk and not faint.

This experience of crying to the Lord and at last gaining the presence of the Lord in accordance with the lovingkindness of the Lord leads the Psalmist to yet one more thing. It leads him to a conclusion which is given us in the last verse of the section. *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

Can you not detect in these words a little bit of the Psalmist saying – *I knew you would come through for me, God. I knew you would hear my cry. I knew you would deal with me in faithfulness and love. I knew and now I know anew that your promises are true and that you are always there for me God. I knew it all along – I have known of old that thou hast founded thy testimonies forever.*

What benefit we gain, then, by making the Psalmist's cry our own cry. We gain the blessing of assurance. We gain the blessing of victory. Most importantly we gain the blessing of the presence of God himself.

May God help us, then, to make this cry of the Psalmist's our own so that we seek him and we seek him with all our hearts. I wonder this morning how close are you to God? How alive are you to his presence and to his lovingkindness? Are those things abstract truths to you or do you know his presence? If you know his presence and his faithfulness then you'll find your heart welling up with gratitude and your desires to follow hard after him will grow stronger.

If what I've been describing is foreign to your experience then you need to cry to him. You need to cry to be heard. Maybe you need to cry for salvation to be applied for the first time to your soul. At any rate – don't settle for a religion of mere theory and empty platitudes. That's not Christianity and it's not salvation. Christ is real and the gospel is true and the blessings of God are to be enjoyed. But they can't be gained through feigned obedience and half hearted pursuing. God, we are told in Hebrews, is the rewarder of those that seek him diligently.

For that reason, then, we all should make the Psalmist's cry our own - *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD... I cried unto thee; save me... I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.*