

Psalm 119: 41-48; "Let Your Mercies come also to me",
A Communion Sermon prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall,
Delivered on June 3rd, 2007, in the Morning Worship Service.

As we read the words of the prayer which introduces this psalm we should understand that not all of the mercies of God's salvation which are bestowed upon us as believers, come to us automatically. However, all of the blessings that we receive in living the Christian life come to us according to the Lord's faithfulness. He is a sovereign King. He distributes His mercies and favors as He pleases. This is why the Christian must learn to develop a prayer life. Some Christians are lazy spiritually. They do not develop a prayer life unless they are forced to it by adverse circumstances in their lives. But this is not at all pleasing to the Lord. The Christian must not think that because he has been saved and has all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ, that somehow he does not need to grow in regard to that salvation. He should not always have to be forced by God's discipline to grow in the Christian life; he should be pursuing growth and maturity in the Christian life. When you begin to pursue holiness, you come to understand that you need the wisdom and grace and power of Christ to do many things every day, even in the ordinary activities of the day. Besides this, there are many lessons to learn in the Christian life, many areas of sin in our lives that need to be addressed and overthrown, and there is a path of liberty that is set before us to walk upon. Let us ask ourselves this morning if we have entered the kingdom of God and whether we are walking on this path of righteousness? Have we seen the sinfulness of our fallen nature? Have we believed in the gospel? Have we received Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin? It is then that we come to know that we are forgiven, and that we have received grace, and that we are receiving grace every day from God. We come to learn that there is grace in which we stand, and then there is the grace in which we walk and live to God's glory. In the first, we are perfect and complete in Christ. Nothing can be added to imputed righteousness and nothing taken away from it. The second is something that we pray that we do not receive in vain. Much will depend on our responding to the grace that we are given. We do not want to be ashamed before Him when we stand before Him at the last judgment. We are taught here in these verses that we must strive, not only to enter the kingdom, but we must labor in prayer to God so that we will be useful and fruitful in his service. The Psalmist by his prayers in these verses, shows us how utterly dependent every believer is upon God for a continuing supply of mercy to come to him so that he might be delivered from the reproach of men and glorify God in his words and deeds in a life of faith and obedience. Every Christian is entirely dependent upon God's mercy to make progress in holiness. So the question which we glean from this text is, "What should you and I pray for and hope for in relation to God's mercy?" I think that we can find 4 things that the Christian hopes for, and prays for, in relation to the mercy of God.

1st - The Christian hopes and prays that God will show him mercy by giving him an answer for those who reproach him. (Verses 41 and 42)

"Let your mercies come also to me, O Lord--Your salvation according to Your word." "So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in your word." The Christian is not always able to have an answer for the one who is reproaching him. But he prays to be able to do so. A Christian is one who is often reproached by unbelievers, either secretly or openly. A reproach is when someone is criticizing you or bringing a charge against you for the things that you do or say, or how you do or say them. A Christian will often be reproached because he is trying to do what is right according to God's holy Word. When he is doing and keeping

God's commandments and sharing the truth of God's Word with others, he will be spoken against. In Luke 6: 26, however, Jesus says, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." When you speak the truth of God's Word, and you live the truth by keeping God's commandments, you will be reproached and perhaps even reviled. If all men speak well of you, it means that you have compromised with the truth of God's Word at some point. People do not like being told the things that they are doing wrong, or being shown by your example that they have neglected or disobeyed God's Word. They will talk to others who they think will sympathize with them. They will call faithful Christians "fools" for living in accordance with God's Word and His commandments. They cannot feel comfortable or free when they are around us because they know that we are trying to serve God, and they do not want to be bound by His service. They may say cruel and cutting things to us, or they may try to prove that they are servants of God just as we are because they go church and take the sacraments. And yet they will not live by faith in God's Word. They have no desire to obey it in all its particulars. They believe that they are forgiven by being religious in some particular way. But conversion to Christ, and being born again by God's Spirit, and living in accordance with God's Word; these are foreign and unpleasant ideas to them.

At this point the great temptation is for the believer to become self-righteous and simply to speak against them as well. But our Psalmist takes a different tack; he knows a more excellent way. He prays, "Let your mercies come also to me." Other Christians have found this godly way of response; let me find it when I am reproached. "So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your Word." What is the way of the godly person? It is to study God's Word with the prayer in his heart, that God would give him an answer to the one who reproaches him. God's Word will give us the answer. The answer is often found in the actions which Jesus commends in such circumstances. Sometimes actions speak louder than words. In Luke 6, after Jesus has said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you," he follows it up by saying this: "But I say to you who hear; Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also." "And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either." "Give to everyone who asks of you." "And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back." "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." Ask yourself this morning if this is you, as a believer, my friend? If it is not, there is some needed repentance on the horizon, and especially in light of the Lord's Supper which you are about to partake of.

The answer is also found in praying about the words that we will say to those who reproach us. In 1st Peter 3, verse 8 and following we find these important words, "Finally all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." "For He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit." "Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it." "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" "And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?" "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed." "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than

for doing evil." "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God..." You see, this is how you and I who believe were brought to God. It was by the sufferings of Christ. And this is also how we teach others about the grace of God in Christ. By suffering for doing what is right and praying that we would be able to "give a defense," "to give an answer to him who reproaches me." This is why we pray for God's mercies to come to us. We will not find the ability to do these difficult things through the observations of our minds upon our own abilities. "I think I can do this without seeking God for mercy." God's mercy is found in Jesus Christ and the gift of His grace. "Let your mercy," that is Jesus Christ, "come also to me, O Lord." We find the strength to do these things to the glory of God through prayer to God for more of the grace our Lord Jesus Christ.

2ndly- The Psalmist hopes and prays that God will not utterly take His Word out of his mouth. (Verse 43)

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances." You and I, who believe in Jesus, are those who are hoping that these ordinances, the preaching of the word, and prayer, and faith that God will do all that He has promised in us; we are hoping that that these ordinances will establish us as faithful servants in both word and deed. But sometimes we allow sin in our hearts to derail the good purpose of God in our lives and thus we fall under his displeasure. This is evidently what happens when we secretly approve of sin in our hearts. We then lose the sense of God's presence and power in our lives, and He may actually leave us only to the sense of ourselves for a time, to show us how awful our sin is. Sometimes people are hypocrites in their hearts, as believers in Christ, for a time, until God roots it up and drives it out of them. Sometimes a person is a hypocrite in heart and they think that they know the Lord, but they really do not. Job 36: 13 and 14 speaks of this. "But the hypocrites in heart store up wrath; they do not cry for help when He binds them." "They die in youth, and their life ends among the perverted persons." But verse 15 speaks of the poor Christian who struggles with their sin when it says, "God delivers the poor in their affliction, and open their ears in oppression." The Psalmist in our text is going to be delivered because he is crying for help when God bound him up. The Psalmist is trusting in God's ordinances. This is why we come to the Lord's table this morning. We are trusting in the efficacy of what Christ has done for us when he hung upon the cross of Calvary. We draw near to this table realizing that we have fallen short in many ways and we need to be cleansed and renewed in our heart, and to feed upon the faithfulness of our Savior. We want to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into light, the One who has taken us out of the kingdom of Satan and has placed us in the kingdom of the Son of His love. This is what all true believers love to do. They love to remember Christ's love for them and they would speak of it to others. They would speak of the power of Christ's grace in their lives. But if they tolerate any known sin in their heart or life, they find that God takes the Word out of their mouths. Psalm 50, verse 16 says, "But the wicked God says: 'What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?' "When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers." "You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit." "You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son." "These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes." "Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his way aright I will show the salvation of God." This is what we come to the table to do this morning; to praise God for His gift of Christ, and then to order our way aright before Him, in order that He might show us more of the greatness of the grace and salvation

which is in our Savior. We have no right to declare His statutes if we either secretly or openly consent to sin in our hearts and lives. God will take His Word of Truth utterly out of our mouths if that is the case. He cannot bless our secret approvals of thieves, adulterers, and slanderers. But He will bless His ordinances when we are hoping that Christ's grace will come to us. Psalm 51: 10 and following say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit." "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You." Each of us, as we approach this table this morning should examine our hearts and our lives to see if there is uncleanness or a divided heart that really wants sin instead of Christ. Let us renounce all sin afresh this day and pray to God that would renew us by pouring out fresh supplies of grace, mercy, and peace upon our lives.

3rdly- The Psalmist hopes and prays that he will be able to keep God's law continually and walk at liberty. (Verses 44-46)

This is the desire of the renewed heart and mind; to "keep God's law continually and walk at liberty." We only have true liberty when by the Spirit's power we are being led away from sin and are set free to serve God in righteousness. There is true freedom and real satisfaction in the keeping of God's commandments out of a thankful heart. When you see what Christ has done for you, and you see how much You owe Him, it is the reasonable and loving response to desire to "keep God's Word, His law forever and ever," as it says in verse 44. Liberty is not found in leaning upon our own understanding. It is found by walking in truth and obedience to God's commandments by the grace of Christ. Sometimes a believer will be reproached because he is not doing the right thing; he is neglecting his duty, or he is not acting as a Christian should, and in this he should be reproached. I think of Jonah, when he deliberately disobeyed the Lord and did not go to preach to the people of Nineveh, as the Lord had commanded him. He was not "walking at liberty," even though he thought that he was. In his supposed liberty, he took a ship in the opposite direction to Tarshish. Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship to sleep so that he could forget about the Lord's commandment to him. Sinful liberty will try to put conscience to sleep. Jonah was able to go fast asleep in the midst of terrible storm. His conscience should have been reproaching him for his disobedience, but he had rationalized his obedience away by means of his conscience. He put his conscience to sleep by justifying his own reasons for his disobedience. And so he had to be rebuked and reproached by the pagan sea captain. The captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper?" "Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." The men on the ship had cast lots to find out the reason that all this trouble had come upon them, and the lot fell upon Jonah. They said to him, "Please tell us!" "For whose cause is this trouble upon us?" "What is your occupation?" "And where do you come from?" "What is your country?" "And of what people are you?" And Jonah said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then it says, "Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, 'Why have you done this?'" They knew that he had disobeyed the Lord, and he rightly deserved to be reproached.

Let me apply this to you in this way. Does any of us here this morning think that our reasons for not obeying a direct commandment of the Lord are significant enough to deny the motions of conscience which God has placed in our soul to tell us when we are doing something wrong? We will never ultimately get away with it! We may put it out of our mind in many ways, but God will prove it to us through unbelievers if necessary. What were Jonah's reasons for doing this? They are found in Chapter 3, verse 11 and following. God had

told Jonah to go and preach to that wicked city Nineveh, and that it would be overthrown if they did not repent within 40 days. But, wonder of wonders, they did repent at Jonah's preaching. And so it says in chapter 3, verse 10, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." Now look at Jonah's reaction. "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry." "So he prayed to the Lord, and said, 'Ah Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?' "Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm." Jonah was troubled about God's showing mercy to those who do not deserve it. He evidently thought that their wickedness was great enough that it should not be forgiven. He thought that the Ninevites should be shown judgment and so he was angry. Who was he really displeased with? Who was he really angry with? He was angry with God. He would rather die than see these wicked Ninevites be shown mercy. He knew that God was merciful and gracious, but he did not want these sinners to be saved.

Perhaps you are a person who has fallen into this kind of sinful attitude. You desire judgment more than mercy. Perhaps you have forgotten the kind of mercy that you received when you became a Christian. You were the enemy of God, but He befriended you. You were alienated from the life of God and He drew near your soul to save it. You were hostile to God and opposed to doing His will, and He reconciled you to Himself by the death of His Son. But now there is someone who has greatly offended you, so much so, that you do not feel that it right that they should be shown mercy, either by yourself or God. You think that their sins are that great. But God calls you to show them mercy. Remember that "mercy triumphs over judgment," it says in James 2: 13. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy." It is for you to become holy, even as God is holy in this way. "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty," it says in James 2: 12. Mercy triumphed over judgment in God's mind when He saved you from your sins. Christ pronounces a blessing upon the merciful in Matthew 5: 7, saying, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

You will walk at liberty when you seek God's precepts to do them by the grace of Christ. This liberty comes to the believer by the mercy of God. Liberty is found in having Jesus Christ as your Savior and knowing Him as Your Lord. You cannot have the One without the other. The person who would be saved by Jesus would have Jesus to rule over him. Without this relationship with Jesus, sin bring us into slavery and bondage. The law then shows us the righteous thing to do, but we find that we cannot do it. The law shows us God righteous expectation for us, but then it condemns us when we fall short of it. The law shows us the righteous standard of what God expects, but it cannot give us the life and power to do and to keep God's commandments. But Jesus Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death. We are freed and come into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We are to stand fast in that liberty by which Christ has made us free. We are not to be entangled by a yoke of bondage of believing that the works of the law or ceremonies, either Old Testament or New, can save us. Circumcision could not save in the Old, and Water Baptism can not save in the New. Neither can taking this supper save any of us. For it is a memorial feast and a means of grace, not in a saving sense, but in the sense of strength and refreshment being imparted to the soul that is already trusting in Christ. Here at the table we "feed upon His faithfulness." It is Christ and His finished work that has saved us. It is our faith which receives Him. It is our declared boast that only Christ could save us. "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." This is what we remember today. God's mercy in Christ, to make us new creatures and to reconcile us to Himself through the death of His Son. Let us remember that we have been given the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son, to be at work in our lives; to change us and transform us into the image of Christ. Having Him, there is real liberty. In 1st Corinthians 3: 17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." Let us come down to the front to partake of this supper because we remember these mercies.

4thly- The Psalmist hopes and prays that he will be able to delight himself in God's commandments and praise God for them. (Verses 47 and 48)

"And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love." "My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes." Why do we love the commandments of God? It is because God has given them to us so keep and to do. Yes this is true. He has given them to us so that we might honor Him in the keeping and the doing of them. But each believer knows, or should know, that He cannot keep the least of God's commandments without Christ's grace at work in His heart. He cannot keep them to God's glory without this. It is Christ who has obeyed the Law fully on our behalf. He is our High Priest who has offered up the acceptable sacrifice. Listen to Hebrews 7, verse 19 and following. "For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." "And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but Christ with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.""), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant." My friends and brethren, it is a New Covenant that we celebrate this day. Listen to what is done for us when we are under this New Covenant. Hebrews 8: 10 says, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." It is all of the Lord's mercy show to us through Jesus Christ; the One whose righteousness, purity and holiness we extol. We He is one who went to the cruel cross and was condemned by those who sat in Moses seat representing God's holy law. And there our Jesus bore our sins, our sorrow for them, and the shame that we should feel forever. And there He purchased redemption. He redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith. And having the Spirit we then find that we can "delight ourselves in God's commandments which we love." "Our hands also we will lift up to God's commandments" which we love." We will meditate on them to see how we can keep them because it has been placed in our hearts to do so. It is because Christ by His Spirit is there. Let us now pray to live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and died for us, and let us pray to keep our vows unto the Lord to live to the glory of God, by keeping His commandments by the grace of Jesus Christ. "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." "I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people."