

Psalm 119:17-24 – Gimel
The Bountiful Dealings of God
Deal bountifully with thy servant... v. 17

The spiritual fitness of a Christian depends entirely on how that Christian utilizes the means of grace. Show me a Christian that is flourishing, who shines brightly for Christ and who demonstrates in his life that he's vibrant in his walk with the Lord. There is a vitality about him that shows that he not only believes in Christ, but he knows Christ and walks with Christ and loves to serve Christ. He abides in Christ and keeps close communion with Christ. Show me that kind of Christian and I'll show you a Christian who spends time in prayer and time in the word of God. He discovers and rediscovers constantly that the word of God is a living word. He doesn't simply learn lessons from God's word but God himself speaks to him in the learning of those lessons.

We have been considering in this 119th Psalm how that the Psalmist loves the word of God. And he doesn't simply love this book the way some love a favorite book. Some love certain books because a particular book may entertain them or inform them or even inspire them. The Psalmist's love and indeed the Christian's love for the word of God doesn't fall into that category of love for particular books. His love, rather, springs from the way the word of God draws him to the God of the word.

We have noted already in the previous sections of the Psalm an emphasis on the heart. **{see underlined references}** We will see more references to the heart as we make our way through this Psalm. All these references to the heart serve to prove the point that I'm now trying to drive home which is that there is or there needs to be a vibrant and thriving element of spiritual vitality in the life of the Christian and the source of that vitality is God's word.

Notice again the opening words of v. 17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.* Do you notice the connection between the Lord dealing bountifully and the Lord's servant living? Here is the result of the Lord's bountiful dealings – here is what makes those bountiful dealings desirable – *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live.* We can certainly draw the truth from this statement that the Lord's dealings with us are what stir us to fuller spiritual life. *I am come* Christ tells us in Jn. 10:10 *that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

Christ's design for his followers, then, is that they know meaningful life, that they know fulfilled or satisfying life. Christians, of all people, should know life with a sense of purpose, life that is not simply mundane and routine but life that enjoys fellowship with Christ and sees his hand of love and mercy in all the ups and downs of life.

It follows, of course, that if this kind of life seems foreign to your experience then chances are you are not knowing nearly enough the bountiful dealings of God with your soul. It may very well be the case this morning that there are those in church this morning

that are languishing rather than thriving in their spiritual lives. Such a condition is all too common in this day and age.

I think one of the things that gives impetus to the Charismatic movement is the perception by many that spiritual vitality is missing in the larger segment of Christianity. And especially does this missing vitality appear quite often in Reformed circles. Those that are Reformed, you see, prefer a more rational religion. And I'm not against religion that is a reasoned out religion but when religion amounts to little more than framing arguments in order to defend or perpetrate your favorite pet notions then that kind of religion has certainly degenerated into the realm of dead or vain religion.

In such circumstances that child of God would do well to devote himself to the opening petition of this section of the Psalm – *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

And so this is what I want to consider this morning – this theme of the bountiful dealings of God. We would all do well to make this petition our own and to give God no rest until we know answered prayer with regard to this petition.

Deal Bountifully with Thy Servant

Consider with me first of all:

I. The Blessings Gained by Such a Petition

The primary blessing is the one that I've already described which is the blessing of life. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live.* You can use the text as a gauge to measure the bountiful dealings of God with your soul. Simply ask yourself this question – *Are you alive?* And I don't mean merely are you alive physically. Obviously that's true. You're walking and talking and breathing and functioning physically so obviously you're alive in that sense. But perhaps that's about the only sense in which you're alive.

But in terms of glorifying God and enjoying him forever, how alive are you? In terms of knowing the joy of salvation as your strength, how alive are you? In terms of Rom. 6:11 how alive are you? And let me add, here, before I quote the verse that I consider this to be the essence of gospel obedience. Ro 6:11 *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* In terms of that verse, how alive are you?

We pray often for revival in this church. I pray for it you might say routinely when I open the worship service in prayer. It's one of the reasons we meet for prayer in the middle of the week. I pray for it in my private times of prayer. And what does the petition for revival really amount to? It's amounts to the renewal of life. *Lord, revive me and in that revival, deliver me from spiritual coldness and deadness and apathy.* We have not yet come across the term in the study of Psalm 119 but we will see it often before we're done – that phrase or that petition *quicken me.* We'll see it for the first time in the next section.

Look at v. 25 and note the contrast *My soul cleaveth unto the dust* – there’s the mark of a man who has become spiritually barren. He cleaves to the dust – he can’t seem to get above or beyond the dust of this world. In such a condition there follows, then, the petition *quicken thou me according to thy word. Give me life according to thy word* another version reads. *Revive me according to thy word* yet another version reads.

In similar fashion we could say that our text falls into this category of life *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live*. There is a plain implication behind such a petition that in contrast to bountiful dealings the Psalmist has only known scarce dealings with his soul. You could say, I suppose, that spiritual famine is the opposite of bountiful dealings. So once again by using our text as a gauge you should ask yourself – *am I knowing spiritual famine or am I knowing bountiful dealings from God?*

The next verse, I believe, expresses the same petition but in a more precise manner. Look at what it says in v. 18, this verse brings to our attention another blessing that is gained through God’s bountiful dealings. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*.

This is a prayer for spiritual illumination. The reason we read Eph. 1 this morning is because we find the New Testament counterpart to this Old Testament petition in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians. *Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,* ¹⁶ *Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;* ¹⁷ *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:* ¹⁸ *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened...*

We find another instance of this spiritual illumination in Lk. 24 with the Emmaus Road disciples. So in vv. 30-32 we read: *And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.* ³¹ *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.* ³² *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

One of the things that has always struck me about that passage is the contrast to the zeal and emotions of those disciples. In the first scene they’re dragging their feet in the dust, downcast and depressed. *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel* they say in v. 21. And after their eyes were opened and they recognized Christ we read in v. 33 *And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them*. It doesn’t say they rose up early the next morning following a good night’s sleep. No, they rose up that same hour and returned, by foot, some 7 to 8 miles back to Jerusalem.

What had happened to them? Their eyes were opened to perceive Christ and Christ had dealt bountifully with their souls by granting them not just understanding of the Scriptures but illumination in their hearts as to the reality of what had been expounded to them. A few verses later, in v. 45, this blessing is conveyed to the rest of the disciples as well. So

we read in v. 45 *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.* This is what happens when God deals bountifully with your soul – your eyes are opened, the eyes of your heart are opened and the truth of Christ reaches the very core of your being and so invigorates you that you too could hastily make that 7 mile journey back to Jerusalem to tell others that you’ve met with Christ.

Now when this prayer is answered, this prayer for the bountiful dealings of God and this prayer for your eyes to be opened – when these petitions are granted you’ll know it by the way you *behold wondrous things out of God’s law.* I love that phrase *wondrous things.* Isn’t that an expressive phrase? When your eyes are opened you’ll behold *wondrous things* or *extraordinary things.* You’ll behold *marvelous things* that fill and thrill your soul.

When was the last time you spent time in God’s word and found your soul so filled with wonder and awe that you simply had to pause and heave a sigh of praise and thanksgiving to God for the greatness of his majestic splendor and power and love? In the series we recently finished in Sunday School on the Christian’s fight for joy John Piper drew an analogy from nature to illustrate the wondrous things of God. He mentioned standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon and taking in the view. That was an illustration I could identify with because I’ve had the privilege of visiting the Grand Canyon a few years ago. No picture can do it justice – not even the giant sized posters that are created by professional photographers. It defies description. The sight of it certainly leaves you struck with wonder and awe.

And nature can do that to you. We can and we should be awed by God’s creation. But it’s only in his word that we can be awed with Christ’s redemption. And we should be awed by his redemption. There’s a stanza in one of the hymns we sang this morning that expresses this awe. In the 3rd stanza of “Great God of Wonders” we sang:

In wonder lost, with trembling joy, We take the pardon of our God: Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood.

I wonder this morning – have you beheld wondrous things from God’s law? Do you find yourself moved to reverence and awe at the revelation of God and of Christ? If you haven’t then the need in your life is for your eyes to be opened. You would do well to make that your earnest prayer before you read God’s word. And when God answers such a prayer you will indeed behold things that will leave you struck with awe and you’ll come away saying *God has dealt bountifully with me* and you’ll be invigorated with a new or renewed source of strength that will enable you to skip along the tops of the mountains, as it were.

So we see the blessings gained by the petition of our text. Would you consider with me next:

II. The Need for Such a Petition

The truth of the matter for the Christian is that he cannot function as a Christian apart from the bountiful dealings of God. The world can and does go on without any reference

to God. That's the meaning of the term *ungodly*. It doesn't necessarily denote hostility toward God so much as it denotes making no reference to God. The Christian cannot go long in such a condition. We cannot live and function the way the world lives and functions. Notice what the Psalmist says in v. 19 *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.*

I am a stranger in the earth. That becomes the testimony of every Christian that has exercised true saving faith in Christ. You remember the verse we studied in Hebrews some time ago which provides a very clear definition of true saving faith? Heb 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of [them], and embraced [them], and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

This verse reveals to us faith's cognition – *they saw the promises* – faith's persuasion *and were persuaded of them* – the action of the will in faith *they saw and were persuaded of the promises and embraced them* – and then there is faith's confession *they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

I am a stranger in the earth the Psalmist says. And because a Christian is a stranger in the earth, he does not live merely for the here and now – he is not motivated by the things of the world which things are to be done away – he has come to learn and to feel the truth expressed by Solomon with regard to the world, that it is all vanity and vexation of spirit, and consequently the Christian must have something more. He's convinced and he knows that a man will not profit though he gain all the world and lose his own soul.

So he must have something better. He must have something more durable and more satisfying. And so strong is his sense of the vanity of the world and the truth that there are to be found true riches and joy and satisfaction in Christ that he is able to say and feel what the Psalmist says and feels in v. 20. Note with me in that verse that not only is the Christian a stranger in the earth but *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

The term *judgment* here is one of a number of terms that are used to describe God's word – which means, then, that the Psalmist has an intense and internal longing of the soul for the word of God. *Man shall not live by bread alone*, Christ says in Mt. 4:4 *but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

The Christian, then, must have God's word. He must have God's word because this is how he has God himself. He draws his vitality from the promises of God's word. He gets his directions for living in God's word. He enters into communion with Christ through God's word. Where the world is concerned – he's a stranger. He doesn't live for the world – he's not motivated by the world.

And what's more – because he's a stranger in the world – because he has longings that are above and beyond this world he is made to bear reproach. *Remove from me reproach and contempt* he prays in v. 22. This magnifies his need for the bountiful dealings of God

all the more for the world, according to Peter, counts the Christian to be strange because we run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (1Pet. 4:4).

The world, you see, does not and cannot understand the Christian. They fail to perceive what makes you tick. And in their ignorance they heap scorn and contempt upon those that would follow Christ. Why, then, do we need the bountiful dealings of God? Why do we need our eyes to be open to behold wondrous things from God's law? We need these things because the world is not our home. We need these things because as those that have been regenerated this is what our souls long for. In a word – we are heart-broken strangers in this world that bear the reproach of this world and so we must have instead the bountiful dealings of God that minister love and grace and mercy to our souls and so equip us to rise above the things of this world while we look for a better world to come – a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10).

I should mention before leaving this point that if you find that you cannot really relate to what I've been describing from this section of Psalm 119 then that would mean one of two things – either you're not a Christian at all or you're so infected with worldliness that your spiritual vitality has been nearly completely choked off. You would do well in such a case to beg God's forgiveness and plead with him to open your eyes anew and afresh.

So we've seen the blessings that are gained through the bountiful dealings of God. We have considered our need for those blessings – they are essential to our existence, given our status as strangers in the world. Would you consider with me finally:

III. The Realization of the Petition

We've considered the blessings. How can you make those blessings yours? How can you come away saying to yourself *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee?*

The most obvious statement to make under this heading which scarcely needs mentioning, but I'll mention it anyway – is that the realization of the bountiful dealings of God come in answer to prayer. This is the Psalmist's petition – *Deal bountifully with thy servant*. I should note here that in order to see this prayer answered it must be prayed with faith believing and it must be prayed earnestly.

We read in Heb 11:6 *But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. This is not the kind of petition that is granted through half-hearted seeking after God. And when you think about it, it makes perfect sense that God would not deal bountifully with those who seek him sparingly.

There is a sense in which the sowing and reaping principle comes into play here. 2Co 9:6 *But this [I say], He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully*. This certainly applies to the way we seek the Lord. It is the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that avails according to

James. And I don't take such a verse to mean that there's merit to fervency. There is not – but there is faith behind fervency and there is sincerity behind fervency.

The Psalmist's fervency is certainly conveyed to us by the words of v. 20 *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments*. When your heart is aching for something then you will pray with fervency and with faith – then you'll ask and seek and knock and keep asking and seeking and knocking until the Lord answers graciously.

The bountiful dealings of God, then, come in answer to prayer. They also come in connection with time in the word. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*. There's no way you'll behold wondrous things out of God's law if the Bible is a closed book collecting dust on your shelf.

A closed book becomes a closed door to the bountiful dealings of God. And a closed book will lead to a hard heart when it comes to the things of God. So you must be in prayer and you must be before the Lord with an open heart to an open book and then you're in a position to know what it is to have your heart filled with Christ – then you'll be in a position to be awed by beholding Christ in his word with the eye of faith.

One more thing I should note here in connection with realizing the bountiful dealings of God. Would you note that in this petition the Psalmist refers to himself as a servant. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word*. It is only the servants of Christ that know the blessings of Christ. It is only the ones that have the desire to keep his word that will be blessed by his word.

Lost souls and hypocrites who play at religion but whose hearts have never been regenerated will know nothing of God's bountiful dealings. And if they have, in some measure, tasted and seen that the Lord is good but remain in rebellion against him and remain bent on having their own way – they, of course, will not be able to relate to the vision or the burden of the Psalmist. Hypocrites endure religion for whatever reason and look for satisfaction in the world. It's a shame that they seem so slow to catch on to the vanity of the world.

And so I wonder this morning as we bring our time to a close – are you longing for the bountiful dealings of God? Are your longings so deep and so strong that you know you must have God's bountiful dealings – you can't live without God's bountiful dealings? You're a stranger in this world because you've set out for a better place. And you need the truth of Christ ministered to your soul in order to live.

Make this petition your petition. Pray the way the Psalmist prays and pray in the manner in which the Psalmist prays and as you pray make sure you're praying over an open Bible with an open heart to God and God will hear and answer. You've heard me say it often with regard to prayers in the Bible – they are there to guide us into praying with confidence, knowing with assurance that when we utilize these prayers we are praying in the will of God. May our hearts be stirred then to seek God for his bountiful dealings until he moves with power and might to revive and refresh our souls.