

The Enlarged Heart Psalm 119:25-32

Intro: The fourth stanza of Psalm 119 begins in what we called in our *Sad Songs Say So Much series* a minor key. We just finished talking about sin, sorrow and suffering and here we are again faced with these issues. It seems we cannot escape the effects of sin, the depths of sorrow, depression and grief.

- **The Apostle Paul** told the early church leaders, after he had preached the gospel to them, to be, ". . . *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 14:22)
- **Charles Spurgeon** echoed the Apostle's words when he said, "*The Road to sorrow has been well trodden, it is the regular sheep track to heaven, and all the flock of God have had to pass along it.*"¹

The fourth stanza is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet—*daleth*. Remember there are eight lines in each stanza and so each line in the *daleth stanza* begin with the Hebrew letter *daleth*. The letter *daleth* sounds like the word death. It is kind of like an onomatopoeia. The psalmist is so stricken with grief and sorrow that he feels like he is dying.

The title of the sermon is *The Enlarged Heart*. It almost sounds like I am talking about dying to title a sermon *The Enlarged Heart* because to have an enlarged physical heart is a medical condition that will lead to death if not properly treated. However, when it comes to the spiritual heart, we want to have an enlarged spiritual heart. The enlarged spiritual heart gives you life and gives it more abundantly. So while this stanza begins on a depressing note it moves from death to life.

The main point of the sermon is: The enlarged heart is free and full of the life of the word of God—Jesus Christ. I have two points this morning:

1. The word of God frees us from the death and despair of sin (vv. 25-28)
2. The grace of God frees us to run in the ways of God (vv. 29-32)

I. The word of God frees us from the death and despair of sin (vv. 25-28)

Verses 25-28 are bookended with the phrase "*according to your word.*" What the psalmist is doing is pressing his prayer and experience of depression and sorrow through the word of God. His desire is to have the word of God shape his suffering. This should be the first thing we consider when we experience suffering. We should go to God in prayer and ask God to revive us by His word. So before we complain or belly ache or talk to someone else, we should ask God to apply His word to our hearts.

Let's keep looking at vv. 25 & 28. He says his *soul clings to the dust* (v. 25) and his *soul melts for sorrow* (v. 28). These phrases describe his experience of sadness, depression, grief and loss.

Let's look at the **Soul that clings to the dust:** In the ancient near east the idea of *clinging to the dust* was a way of expressing great sorrow and sadness. The ancients used to tear their clothes and throw dust on their heads and bodies when they were experiencing great grief. It expressed the idea that their grief had brought them to the very point of death.

This custom finds its roots in Genesis where the curse is pronounced on Adam for disobeying the word of God. God told Adam that from dust he was taken and to dust he will return. It was NOT that Adam threw dust on his head after he had broken God's word and the curse was pronounced. However, over time people understood they were going to die and return to the dust. So over time people began to express deep sorrow and grief by tearing their clothes (decay) and throwing dust on their heads because they felt like they were grieved to the point of death. The brokenness of the world was working itself out in the curse and they tasted its effects in their sorrow and grief. Here are some biblical examples:

¹ Charles Spurgeon, Sermon: *The Fainting Hero*, MTP, Vol. 55, cited in Zack Eswine's book *Spurgeon's Sorrows*, 17.

- **After Israel's defeat at Ai: (Joshua 7:6),** *"Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads."*
- **When Job's three friends saw him: (Job 2:12),** *"And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven."*
- **After Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel, He told them that if they went to a city if they were rejected to say to the people of the town,** *"Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near."¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."* (Luke 10:11-12) In other words, they had chosen death and judgment.

Now let's consider the **Soul that melts**: In v. 28, the word *soul* can also be translated *heart*. The psalmist is saying his heart has melted within him because of the grief and sorrow he has experienced. The Hebrew word *melts* means to weep to the point of sleeplessness. It is to cry all night long over the event or thing that has broken your heart. As ice melts so does the heart and the tears flow as a result.

Have you ever had grief of this magnitude? It is an experience of great sadness so great that it seems like hope has even perished. It feels like utter hopelessness. When there is the death of hope one will hope for death. It is a tremendously dark experience where you just feel like your soul has shriveled up and died. This is the soul that has melted.

But this is not the final state of the soul for the psalmist. Hope is not lost. His grief, sorrow, pain, tribulation, trials and depression caused him to move toward God and to move toward His word. So instead of hiding from God and not listening to His voice, the psalmist moves toward God.

You see it was the breaking of the word of God in the Garden that brought grief and sorrow into the world. It is the result of the curse but now, the psalmist reminds us that for the curse to be broken we must trust in word of God. He knows there is life and strength found by pressing our grief and sorrow through the word of God instead of hiding from it.

In v. 25, the psalmists asked God to *give him life*. The phrase "*give me life*" is the Hebrew word for *revive or restore life*. It means to give life to one that was dead. In 2 Kings 13, the story is told of Moabites who invaded Israel and after a battle they were burying their dead and they threw one of their dead Moabite comrades in the cave where Elisha was buried. When the Moabite man fell on the bones Elisha, the Moabite came to life. The word for *life* that the psalmist uses the word for in v. 25 is the same word for life in 2 Kings 13 when the dead Moabite came to life.

But how was the psalmist's heart going to be revived? The bones of a dead prophet who preached the word of God do not give life—it is the word of God itself that gives life. It is "*according to the word of God.*" Listen to Deuteronomy 8:3, "*And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not **live** by bread alone, but man **lives** by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" The word of God gives life and when it gives life we are revived and turn to God.

In vv. 26-27, we see the hope of the psalmist. Look in v. 26. He says that *he told God of his ways* and when he did that he found comfort because God answered him. He confessed his sin. The sign of life is confession.

Not only did He confess his sinful way but he also asked God to help him change by understanding God's ways. In other words, he confessed his lack of understanding God's word. Notice how he prayed in v. 27, *make me understand*. He asked God to sovereignly do in him what he could not—*God make me understand Your word, make me understand Your ways*. It is good to ask God to sovereignly make you obedient. It is not that your obedience is one where you obey but you are kicking and screaming like a

little child who is being dragged away from the toy store. No . . . instead it is your deepest desire to obey but you know your heart is wicked and you need God to do more in your life. You are asking God to overcome your resistance by making you willing. It is a wonderful prayer to pray.

Application:

1. **Do you ever pray the way the psalmist does? Do you** ask God to make you do understand His word when suffering comes into your life? **Do you** ask God to make you think biblically about your suffering? **Do you** ask God to make you feel love toward His word? **Do you** ask God to change your heart when you do not think about your sin and suffering according to God's word? **Do you** ever ask God to make your sinful, rebellious heart to submit to God? These are all good ways to pray.

The problem is that we unable to make our own hearts submit to God and His word. We are unable to make our hearts feel toward God what they ought to feel. **We are** unable to obey the word of God in our own strength. **We are** still sinners and our deceitful heart still need to be reined in and made to understand and obey God. **We may** be saved but we are still fallen people. **We must** ask God to revive our hearts, to quicken them to life so we will submit to the word of God.

The good news is that God loves to hear these prayers from His people. He loves to hear and answer honest prayers that confess sin, crave comfort and comprehension of His word by His Holy Spirit. **He loves** to hear His people pour out their broken hearts to Him when they are in the middle of trials and tribulations because He loves to come near the broken hearted.

It is in those moments we need to meditate on God's word for it is by God's word we find life and strength. When Satan tempted Jesus to sin in the wilderness Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 8:3** and told Satan that *man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*. It is in God's word that we find life. There is no doubt that God will comfort us when we are suffering.

2. However, we need to notice something very specific about the depression and grief of the psalmist in **vv. 25-32**. His sadness was caused by very specific circumstances—disobedience. The psalmist was grieving because he had disobeyed God. Does it break your heart when you disobey God? Are you grieved like the psalmist was? Does it cause you pain or is it no big deal?
3. **Let me make one final application from vv. 25-28**. When you die and stand before God and He asks you why He should let you into Heaven, whose word will you stand behind? You see when you stand before God you cannot say to God, by my own word or my pastor said or my teacher said or my friends said or any other religious leader. No one will be standing with you before God unless you have trusted the True Word of God Jesus Christ. The only way to enter heaven and not go to Hell is according to the Word of Christ. His word gives you life. It is only by the way of the cross that will lead you home. As the old hymn says:

*I must needs go home by the way of the cross,
There's no other way but this;
I shall ne'er get sight of the Gates of Light,
If the way of the cross I miss.*

- Refrain:

*The way of the cross leads home,
The way of the cross leads home;
It is sweet to know, as I onward go,
The way of the cross leads home.*

*I must needs go on in the blood-sprinkled way,
The path that the Savior trod,
If I ever climb to the heights sublime,
Where the soul is at home with God.
Then I bid farewell to the way of the world,
To walk in it nevermore;
For my Lord says, "Come," and I seek my home,
Where He waits at the open door.²*

II. The grace of God frees us to run in the ways of God (vv. 29-32)

If vv. 25-28 are bookended by the word of God, vv. 29-32 are bookended by the grace of God. We find in the *daleth stanza* the connection between grace and truth. We also see in the *daleth stanza* the relationship between the sovereignty of God and human responsibility.

In v. 29 the psalmist cries out in prayer for God to pour out His grace on him by teaching him the truth of the truth law. Literally the psalmist says "*grace me.*" It is a work of the grace of God when the word of God penetrates our sorrows to the deep places of our hearts so that we are lifted up. It is a work of grace that enables us to put false thoughts about God and our false ways behind us. This is the desire to repent for he does not simply want to quit living life in opposition to God's ways but he wants to live knowing the law so he will live faithfully before God as v. 30 says.

Application: So in v. 29 he asks God to do what he cannot do—put his life of lies behind him by giving him grace. He knew he needed the grace of God to live faithfully before God. As God gives grace to us, we respond by living a grace-driven life. God's grace is underneath our obedience to God.

Let's apply it this way. We are vulnerable to false thoughts about God and practicing falsehoods that flow out of those false thoughts about God and His word especially when we are suffering. We are weak people and suffering *can* cause our hearts and minds to be open to bad doctrine and the lies of the enemy.

Think about the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were not suffering in the Garden but the serpent made them think that God was holding out on them by not allowing them to eat of the fruit of one tree. He caused them to believe a lie about God and questioned God's word to them—"Did God really say . . . and did God really mean?" The result was false beliefs about God, doubting God's good word and this resulted in false ways by Adam and Eve. They clung to the word of the serpent instead of the word of God. Beware of what you cling to when you are faced with difficulty.

So if you lose your job or your finances dry up or your spouse leaves you or a loved one dies, be careful to what you cling to. If your sin has brought you low and is causing brokenness in your life be careful what you cling to in those moments. Make very sure you are clinging to truth and grace found in God's word.

Next we see in v. 31 how the word and grace has worked itself out in the life of the psalmist. He has moved from clinging to death to clinging to words of life. The beauty of this is that the psalmist is clinging to God because God first clung to him. God is holding him fast. There will never be any shame for the believer who clings to God because the promises of God are always yes in Christ and fulfilled in Christ.

² http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/The_Way_of_the_Cross_Leads_Home/. By **Jessie B. Pounds**, 1906.

Finally we have come full circle with the psalmist. He cries out for God to sovereignly work in his life in v. 29 and then we see the psalmist's taking responsibility by choosing the way of faithfulness and clinging to God's testimonies by the grace given. The stanza ends by working back toward the grace of God in v. 32.

Verse 32 is probably my favorite verse in all of Psalm 119. What does it mean for us to have our hearts enlarged? It is the broadening of our understanding of God, God's word and God's ways so that we begin to live according to the word and ways of God. It is the setting free of our hearts.

It is a two-fold idea that we find in v. 32. Let me show them to you in the New Testament:

1. **Hebrews 12:1-2**, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*
2. **Ephesians 3:14-19**, *"¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

So it is a laying aside of sin by understanding the depth of the person and work of Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

Furthermore, it is not a one-time laying aside learning but a continual laying aside of sin and continually learning about how the gospel applies to all of life.

Application: So how does the enlarged heart flesh itself out in our lives? The enlarged spiritual heart is actually the heart that works correctly. Biblical counselor Jeremy Pierre says, *"The human heart [spiritual heart that is the control center of a person's life] works properly when it follows the contours of Jesus' experience. His trust in the Father both models and enables human faith. As we live by faith in Christ, all aspects of human experiences are gradually (and sometimes quickly) restored. Christ has provided to believers everything they need to respond rightly in the situations they find themselves. Jesus is the hope of the human experience restored."*³

For example, think about the sexual revolution that is going on today. There is no greater need for biblical truth and grace than now. Those who struggle with gender identity need to know that God did not make a mistake when he created them. There is no shame in the struggle because in our fallen state everyone has a different struggle with sin. Same sex attraction is not a sin unless it is acted upon. Same sex attraction is not their identity but a temptation to sin.

Someone else might not struggle with same sex attraction but instead struggle to remain faithful to their covenant vows in marriage, while another person might struggle with pornography or some other sexual sin. Another person might struggle with lying or gossip. To be tempted is not shameful but to sin is shameful and an offense against God.

The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God will reject the idea that to be tempted by sin is shameful but will be broken when he or she sins. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows it has been set free from the sinful identity that the enemy wants him or her to label them. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows that we are all sinners BUT the person who has faith in Christ is a redeemed sinner who is a child of God. He or she may find victory over some

³ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 84-86.

sins while some sins remain a battle for the rest of their lives. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows victory over sin one day does not mean victory over sin the next day. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows that the gospel is the power of God for his or her sanctification. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows he or she must understand their gospel identity to help them overcome sin. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows they need the church to surround them with love and acceptance which helps them apply the gospel. **The heart that has been enlarged by the grace of God** knows they need the church to help them lay aside their sin so they can learn how to comprehend how deep, wide, long and precious is the love of God that has been given to them through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Conclusion

We can praise God that we have not resisted our struggle with sin to the point of shedding our own blood that Jesus Christ did. On the Mount of Olives, in that Garden, before He was crucified, He resisted sin to that point. Jesus understands what it means for a soul to cling to the dust for His soul clung to the dust. He said His own soul was troubled even to the point of death. The heart of Christ melted under the suffering He endured when He paid for our sin on the cross and yet He did not sin. Jesus purchased for His people life according to the word of God. He purchased the enlarged heart by setting the heart free and the one whom Jesus sets free is free indeed. He is free to run in the way of God's commandments.

You see God's commands are not for restricting your life. They actually are for your freedom. When your heart is enlarged toward Jesus, the True Word of God, you understand wants to give you true freedom.

If you do not understand that God's word is for your freedom then the false words and ways of the enemy still have hold of your heart. You must cry out to God to do in your life what you cannot make yourself do: repent of your sins. If you do not turn to Christ then eventually you will be ashamed because you have rejected true freedom that comes only in Christ.