

The Established Heart  
Psalm 119:73-80

**Intro: We are now in the *yodh* stanza.** The letter *yodh* is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It is shaped kind of like an apostrophe except it is a letter. Jesus referred to it as a jot or tittle in the New Testament when He was talking about the Law. He said that *not a jot or tittle will pass away until all has been completed*. Although the *yodh* is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet the subject of the *yodh* stanza is by no means least of all the Hebrew letters, as we will see this morning.

**Verses 73-80 are really part 2 of last week's sermon.** The psalmist stays on the theme of affliction but presses the issue of how we respond to a new level. Last Sunday looked at how the psalmist looked back over his afflictions and saw it was good he was afflicted because it brought him back to the Lord. He had been drifting away and affliction caused him to repent.

This morning I want to begin our time with a couple of questions for us to consider as we work on these verses:

1. **In what ways has the example of suffering in other Christians and in the life of the Lord Jesus, encouraged you and even has made you rejoice?** This question helps us to press the gospel application of suffering deeper into our lives.
2. **Another question we want to ask is what do others take away from observing how you suffer?** How we suffer is never about us alone but always spills over on to the lives of others. How we respond to suffering disciples others in their suffering. We will consider these two questions as we move through these verses.

**The main point of this stanza is:** God uses the grace of affliction to press the word deep in our hearts to shape us into obedient followers of Christ. In other words, God does not waste our suffering. He uses it to enlarge our hearts through the means of grace of suffering and shape us into fully devoted disciples of Christ that display His glory by obeying His word.

**I have four points to help us work through the text.**

1. God uses the grace of affliction to shape our hearts by His word (vv. 73-75)
2. God uses the grace of affliction to cause our hearts to delight in the promised mercies of God (vv. 76-77)
3. God uses the grace of affliction to shape our hearts to be a display the glory of God (vv. 78-79)
4. God uses the grace of affliction to perfect our hearts in His word (v. 80)

**I. God uses the grace of affliction to shape our hearts by His word (vv. 73-75)**

As we consider the psalmist approach to affliction we realize very quickly he does not hold to the prosperity-gospel but instead he holds to what we might call *the adversity-gospel*. As with many of these stanzas, the first verse of the stanza is the main point of the stanza and the rest of the stanza unpacks its point.

**Verse 73 begins with the phrase,** "*Your hands have made and fashioned me.*" Literally he is saying that God's hands or God fashioned or shaped him for divine purposes. This is truth not just for the psalmist but for all of us.

We were shaped not simply in the womb at conception but in all facets of our lives we have been shaped by God's hands—even in the affliction we experience.

The word *made* in v. 73 is the same word used in **Genesis 1** when God *made the heavens and the earth*. We are made in His image, for His purposes and placed in His creation where He wants us. **The Apostle Paul** refers to the fashioning work of God in the lives of people in **Acts 17:24-27** when he was witnessing to the Athenians on Mars Hill. Paul said, "*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,* <sup>25</sup> *nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.* <sup>26</sup> *And he made from one man every nation of*

mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,<sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him." God has people where He wants them in the world so they will seek Him and *perhaps* find Him.

The psalmist praises God for His sovereign, providential, creative work in his life and he knows he needs understanding about where God has placed him in the world. **Application: Have you ever considered this?** Since God has you where He wants you in your life right now then wisdom says what you need to be doing is asking God for understanding about your appointment for this particular time. The question is: Are you asking God for understanding about where you are in your life or are you just wanting to move on to the next thing without understanding what God is doing in your life?

**Illst: Do you remember the story of Esther?** . . . Tell the story . . . Mordecai can say to Esther, "*And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" Mordecai understood God's providential hand in their situation in Babylon.<sup>1</sup> [What was affliction for Esther and God's people, because they had been taken captive in the beginning, was deliverance in the end.]

Often uncertainty about God's plan and His faithfulness, lack of confidence in God and discontentment come into our hearts because we forget to ask God for understanding of our situation. We fail to press hard into the word of God for the change of heart that is needed to endure.

**The word of God will give us the understanding necessary.** We may not have all of our questions answered but we will have the most important question answered and that is how do we live through our affliction in light of the gospel? **Short Answer:** we must live into the word of God. That's right, live into the word of God and His story of redemption.

**Here is what I mean.** Often what we want to do is to ask God for a moral nugget and ethical principle that will make us feel better about our suffering or give us some overly simplified "*how to*" when really what we need is to press our lives hard into God's redemptive story. **We need to resist** lifting a verse out of context for an emotional-devotional and ask God to press our lives through the sieve of the word of God and in particular the person and work of Christ. It is not natural for us to ask the question: how does the gospel apply to my situation and then think through the implications of the person and work of Christ. Yet when we do this, we begin to get understanding of our lives in light of God's grand redemptive story. God gets bigger; the glory of God gets brighter (not that it was not already brighter, we are actually able to see better), the power of the cross is experienced and the ugliness of sin tenderizes our consciences more and more so we repent by turning to Jesus. We are humbled and at the same time understand to a greater degree the breadth and depth of God's love seen in the crucifixion and resurrection of God's Son.

**What happens when we live life in light of the gospel and understanding the word of God? Look at v. 74.** The psalmist is praying and in his prayer he thinks of his brothers and sisters in the faith with whom he shares life. He thinks of them and realizes his brothers and sisters will praise God, they will be strengthened and their hope in God will increase as he holds fast to God in his affliction. When we meet suffering with the understanding of the word of God it creates rich community and friendships. It encourages others to hold fast to the promises of God. It helps us to understand that our affliction is not simply about us.

**Christopher Ash**, commenting on v. 74 in his book *Bible Delight* says, "*Here is the encouragement when the visible world shouts at me that it is stupid to trust the word of God about the invisible age to come. It makes such an impact to see another visible, audible, tangible human being who really thinks the written word of God is more trustworthy than the sensible evidence of the world. It*

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<sup>1</sup> The text never said that Mordecai asked for understanding but theologians agree that Mordecai sought God for wisdom about the situation that Israel faced and recognized the hand of God in it and Esther's place in it as well.

is wonderful to see someone else who really believes God means what he says, and proves he believes it by sticking to God when there's nothing in it for him [except affliction]. The believer in the Adversity Gospel is a powerful encouragement to others."<sup>2</sup>

**One of the best contexts to experience encouragement in affliction is in your small group.** It might be in one of our regular small groups or in one of our men's or women's groups. Our groups will be launching back into their regular schedule in September so if you are not in a small group I hope you will talk to me and let me help you find one.

**Illst:** I remember sitting in a men's small group about two years ago and over breakfast Jack Ellis shared with our men that he had cancer and was getting ready for surgery and treatment. I remember Jack's words as he shared his diagnosis with the men, Jack said, "*The gifts of God don't always come wrapped in a bow.*" "Wow!"—I thought. That was profound to me because on the front end he was already viewing his affliction as a gift from Jesus. It made and still makes an impact on me. I often think of what he said when I am facing affliction.

**Jack's confession was in line with the psalmist's confession in v. 75, "I know O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me."** The psalmist now gets to the point that is so challenging for us—God-fashioned-affliction. For Christians and non-Christians, this is the sweet spot or the sore spot (depending on how you look at it). Yet just like the *teth stanza* the psalmist does not apologize for God but simply confesses his faith in God even in the affliction.

Notice what he says in v. 75, *he knows the Lord's rules are righteous*. He confesses God's word is true and sure and right. It is holy just like the Lord Himself. The word of God is a reflection of the character of God because it proceeds from God. He just does not "*feel*" like this is true—NO—he says he *knows* it to be true. The doctrine that proceeds from this is that even in affliction—God is righteous, He is holy and He is good and even in his affliction God is just. God has dealt with him justly in his suffering.

Brothers and sisters we get the most out of our suffering when we are thankful to God for our suffering and confess it is for the glory of God. One of the key things we must get our minds around and constantly be reminded of is that affliction is actually an expression of covenant faithfulness to us. God disciplines those whom He loves and it would be unloving of Him to not discipline us. If He didn't love us He would simply let us go but because He loves His children He afflicts. He does not willingly but it is His aim to keep us walking in His ways, to keep us believing His promises, to keep us trusting Him, and to keep us persevering. Afflictions are a means of God grace given to us for our good. You see the affliction of God is not a failure of God's faithfulness but quite the opposite—it is an expression of it.<sup>3</sup> Truly God uses affliction to ground the hearts of His people in His word.

## **II. God uses the grace of affliction to cause our hearts to delight in the promised mercies of God (vv. 76-77)**

**I really like the way the New King James reads in these two verses:** "*Let, I pray, Your **merciful kindness** be for my comfort, According to Your word to Your servant.*"<sup>77</sup> *Let Your **tender mercies** come to me, that I may live; For Your law is my delight.*"<sup>4</sup>

**Verses 76-77** are so important when suffering and affliction have been at work in our lives. Confessing the righteousness, providence and faithfulness of God in affliction is of little consolation unless we can taste the tender mercies of God. The psalmist teaches us how to pray when we are enduring afflictions—"Father be merciful to me, let me taste the sweetness of Your kindness and mercy."

**Application:** Perhaps you are praying for a brother or a sister in Christ who is going through affliction. Are you praying he or she will taste the tender mercies of God? This is a good prayer to pray for them.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Ash, *Bible Delight*, 105.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 108. Ash's work on this stanza is simply wonderful to read.

<sup>4</sup> [\*The New King James Version\*](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ps 119:76-77.

**Question:** Do you think of how this brother or sister will taste the tender mercies of God? The mercies of God in vv. 76-77 are grounded in the *steadfast love* of God or the *covenant promise* of God. We also see this covenant understanding of God's mercies in the phrase *your law is my delight*. The Law represented God's covenant relationship with His people. The giving of the Law to His people was a tender mercy and now when the psalmist was going through affliction he turned to the word of God where the covenant of God was grounded and delighted in the word of God in order to taste the tender mercies of God.

**The mercies of God are not some abstract experience or some warm fuzzies.** They are uniquely connected to and grounded in the word of God.

**I love singing worship songs, you know: songs, hymns and spiritual songs.** Songs have a way of touching the heart with the word of God that is unique. However, I find there are some songs, hymns and worship songs, whether old or contemporary that are not grounded in the word of God but simply based on a catchy tune or peppy melody. The melody or rhythm of the song gives an emotional experience that is not grounded in the word of God and therefore is not in the true mercies of God. It is a warm fuzzy that may last as long as a breath on a cold winter morning.

We do not need the warm fuzzies or emotional-devotionals but the deep, lasting, tasty, tender mercies of God that are grounded in the person and work of Christ. You see this is where the ultimate mercy of God has been displayed.

**Mercies that are disconnected from the cross of Christ and the resurrection of Christ are not the mercies of God.** They may be a top ten hit on the contemporary Christian music chart or a popular old hymn that gets everyone singing but these mercies do not feed the soul nor do they anchor the soul.

**It is the mercy of God that flowed out of the veins of Christ on the cross. Until you see** that as the ground of your mercy, you will simply crave to feel better. **Until you see** the ground of your mercy sitting at God's right hand interceding for you when you are in the pit of despair then your mercy is a cheap imitation. **Until you see** the mercy that heals you died on the cross, was raised from the dead and now is in heaven pouring out His eternal mercy on you then you are simply seeking to bandage your disease instead of letting the Savior do surgery on your soul. We delight in the mercy of Christ by learning how to see His mercy on every page of the word of God. When you do this then you truly taste the mercy of God and this will anchor your heart in affliction.

### **III. God uses the grace of affliction to shape our hearts to be a display the glory of God (vv. 78-79)**

**In v. 78 insolent are called out one more time.** Like the last stanza the *insolent* lied about the psalmist. The insolent harmed him greatly. When we hear the psalmist talk about how the *insolent* have harmed him we are actually seeing the shadow of the cross. It was the lies of the *insolent: the Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers* that sent Jesus to the cross.

**Ultimately it was the work of the father of lies, Satan himself.** His temptation of Jesus was to turn Him from obeying God's word when He was enduring great affliction. Satan wanted to twist the word of God and cause Him to sin against God like Adam did (although Adam did not endure affliction, Adam sinned when all was well). Yet Christ overcame Satan because it was His delight to meditate on and obey the word of God.

**As a result of Christ's obedience, v. 79 is the word for the church.** For it is those who are in the church that **fear** God today, they are the ones who **turn** to Christ and know His gospel. It is because of the testimony of Christ that you and I can endure suffering. We fear God and **turn** to Jesus.

**Yet it is not only about us turning to Jesus but as we endure for the glory of God others observe our suffering, fear God and turn Jesus.** We are able to think of our local church and the larger body of Christ as we are enduring afflictions because Christ was thinking of us as He persevered in suffering. Likewise, when we think of our brothers and sisters in Christ, our suffering

becomes a source of encouragement for them because our suffering displays the glory of God in the in the shadow of the cross and they turn to Jesus.

#### **IV. God uses the grace of affliction to perfect our hearts in His word (v. 80)**

Finally we understand that everything we have been talking about in this stanza is more than mere head knowledge but it is heart knowledge. Through our affliction hope in Jesus is planted deep in our hearts. Notice that from word *understanding* in v. 73 to the word *heart* in v. 80, the idea of depth of the heart-knowledge is woven through out all of this stanza. Consider the words: *understanding* (v. 73), *learn* (v. 73), *fear* (v. 74), *rejoice* (v. 74), *hoped* (v. 74), *know* (v. 75), *comfort* (v. 76), *delight* (v. 77), *meditate* (v. 78), *fear* (v. 79), *know* (v. 79) and *heart* (v. 80).

**The idea of the depth of the psalmist's heart knowledge is progressive sanctification.** He says *may my heart be blameless*. The meaning of the Hebrew word *may* means **to become**. The affect and effect of the word of God on the heart of the believer is gradual and continual transformation and in this context the word of God is doing its work in adversity.

**Finally we understand there is no shame in sanctification.** The *ultimate shame* is to reject Christ. When Jesus walked the earth, He displayed the work of God to reveal who He truly was but He was rejected by the religious establishment of the day.

**For example, on one occasion Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath.** Luke 17 records that he freed the woman from her disabilities. It infuriated the leader of the synagogue and he rebuked Jesus in front of the people who were listening to Him teach. Jesus told Him that His work and the work of the gospel is to free people to worship God. **Luke 17:13**, "*As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.*" You see if you are rejecting Christ today and the freedom He offers, it will be to your eternal shame unless you repent and trust in Christ.

**I often come back to Hebrews 12 when it comes to the person and work of Christ.** It is one of my favorite passages to taste and see the work of Christ on the cross. The person and work of Christ explained in the **Hebres 12:1-5** is so precious and in this case helps us understand the gospel connection to **Psalm 119:73-80**, "*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, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?"*

**Friend if you are here and you are not a Christian then you need to know that you do not have to** face eternal shame because on the cross Christ has taken your shame for you. **You do not have to** spend eternity in Hell because Christ endured Hell on the cross for you. **You do not have to** endure the wrath of God because Christ took the wrath of God for you on the cross.

Galatians tells us cursed and shamed is everyone who hangs on a tree and in this case it means who is crucified on a cross. Jesus, on the cross, took this for you because He loves you. He took this for you so that in your hour of affliction you may taste the tender mercies of God. He tasted the curse and its shame so you can taste and see the steadfast love of God and have comfort.

#### **Conclusion**

This past week Barna released its annual *State of the Bible* report and it revealed that half of all Americans are Bible users. However, a Gallup survey found that more Americans have views on morality that are at odds with biblical teaching. Why is this?

It is because being a Bible user and having your heart transformed by the word of God are not the same thing. Until we immerse ourselves in God's word we will continue to live lives with worldviews that are at odds with Scripture.

This survey reveals why the Prosperity Gospel and shallow worship is popular with Americans and the Adversity Gospel and gospel-centered worship is not.

Americans want what Philip Yancey called moral McNuggets where you take a Bible verse and disconnect it from the larger redemptive story in the Bible and use it for devotional-cafeine hit. It might give you the jitters for a short period but when it wears off you are tired and worn out again and looking for another emotional-devotional.

Until we learn to live our lives in the grand, sweeping, redemptive story found in Scripture we will never have depth of heart. We will not fully understand and taste the tender mercies of the cross. We will constantly be pushed and pulled by fad theologies and hipster worship and approaches to church.<sup>5</sup>

May the Lord be merciful to us and allow us to be a family in service together for the sake of the gospel and may we suffer for the sake of the gospel so that we will be a display of the glory of God in all things for the joy of all peoples.

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<sup>5</sup> The World and Everything in It, Nick Eicher interview with John Stonestreet. Stonestreet is the director of the Colson Center for Worldview.  
<http://worldandeverything.org/2018/08/culture-friday-life-on-ice/>.