

The Pleading Heart
 Psalm 119:153-160
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As we come to the *Resh* stanza, the psalmist is still praying. In the *Resh* stanza, he is pleading with God for life but he is not pleading to a disinterested God or an absent God but to Yahweh who is not only interested but invested in his struggle. So . . . when we think of the psalmist pleading, don't think that the psalmist was trying to change God's attention. This is not what is going on in this stanza.

Think of the *Resh* stanza as that of legal proceedings. The psalmist prayer is asking Yahweh to plead his cause and give him life. Here is the main point: *Take your requests to God because Christ is our Advocate for our sin and in our suffering.* This stanza unfolds in three movements.

Before we begin to dig into vv. 153-160, I want to point out some characteristics of this stanza that will help us as we work through it. First, I want you to notice the idea of seeing. In v. 153, the psalmist says, "*Look on my affliction.*" Then in v. 154, he says, "*Plead my cause.*" The request is for God to look at his case and take his case. Then in v. 158, "*I look.*" The psalmist says he looks at those who reject God and he is appalled. Finally, in v. 159 he says, "*consider*" my life and give me life. The fact that the psalmist knows God sees and then has the power to change things gives him great faith as he asks God takes his case.

Next, in v. 156 and v. 157, we find a numerical contrast between the great number of mercies of God and the psalmist many persecutors. In v. 156 he says, "*Great is your mercy.*" Then in v. 157 he says, "*Many are my persecutors.*" In both verses the words *Great* and *Many* can be translated *Abundant*. So, it can read *Abundant are your mercies* in contrast to *Abundant are my persecutors.* The idea is that when we turn to God's word we find God's mercies are more abundant than the abundance of persecutors. God's word is not simply words on a page but Spirit-filled words that pour out abundant mercies that give life. This leads us to the last phrase and the structure of this stanza.

Finally, the phrase that gives structure and our outline this morning is, "*give me life.*" The psalmist is pleading in prayer for God—to *give him life according to the abundant mercies of his word.* Three times he asks Yahweh to *give him life.*

The question to ask ourselves as we dig into this text is: In what possessions or people or circumstances are you pleading for in order to give you life? For the psalmist, his search had stopped. He knew life was only found in Yahweh. What about you? In what or where are you still searching for life?

I. We should plead for life according to the gracious promise of our Redeemer (vv. 153-154)

¹⁵³ *Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law.*

¹⁵⁴ *Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!*

These first two verses set the stage for the stanza. It is a courtroom scene. The psalmist is praying and asking Yahweh to take his case and to be his Advocate. He says, "*Look on my suffering and take my case. I am trusting in your word. Redeem me according to your promise of life!*" I really like the way Old Testament scholar Alec Motyer translates these two verses, "*See my humiliation and set me free, because I have not forgotten your teaching. Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your word.*"¹

Motyer goes on to say that in this stanza *Yahweh is pictured as a lawyer taking a case that is related to the biblical claim that deliverance, salvation, and being set free must be done according to God's righteousness and fulfill God's law.*"² Christopher Ash says, *Plead my cause can be literally translated, "Plead my pleading in court, be my Advocate" and redeem me; give me life according to your promise! [The psalmist] prays for the Cross, though he does not know it.*³

The psalmist was throwing himself on the mercy of God's court and specifically the Judge, God Himself. He was appealing to God as Judge but he was also appealing to God to be his Redeemer to pay his debt and set him free from his prison of humiliation and affliction.

¹ Alec Motyer, *Psalm By The Day: A New Devotional Translation*, 360.

² Ibid, 360.

³ Christopher Ash, *Bible Delights: Heartbeat of the Word of God: Psalm 119 for the Bible Teacher and the Bible Hearer*, 184.

Here is the significance of the phrase *redeem me*. It is connected to the phrase *draw near* in v. 150 and v. 151. It means *next-of-kin*. He was appealing to Yahweh to be his *Kinsman Redeemer*. So, in reality he was not only asking Yahweh to be *his Lawyer and Judge but to also to bear the burden of his debt*.

The psalmist was truly humiliated and at his lowest. It felt like he was in prison so he laid it all out before the Lord and said, *"I need saving! Help me. I cannot defend myself or even pay my debt so Lord will You please do it? I am spiritually bankrupt. I have nothing left. My bank account is empty and my strength is gone. If you do not set me free I am doomed."*

The psalmist went to the only place he could find life—the grace of the promise of God. The Hebrew word for *promise* in v. 154 is the same word in v. 11, which says, *"I have stored up your word in my heart."* What this means is that while all other accounts are empty the riches of the grace of the word of God were super abundant.

The psalmist's prayer drew on the riches of God's word invested in his heart. He knew the promise of God to save His people. The psalmist's pleading was not some prayer with his fingers crossed but one of faith and confidence. He believed and knew God would honor His promise.

We should ask ourselves a couple of questions as we consider these verses. First, where do you go for life when you feel like you are in a prison of humiliation? The Hebrew word *affliction* in v. 153 means to be humiliated and made to feel low, to be oppressed, and forced into submission by hostility. Have you ever been humiliated in public? Have you ever been the one everyone makes fun of or mocks? I don't mean friendly banter with those who love you. I mean embarrassed in a way that was hostile? It is a painful place to be. Teenagers who have been mocked on social media have taken their own lives because of this kind of humiliation. Social media is an environment that feeds on *hostile humiliation* of others.

The work environment is another place where hostile humiliation thrives. The desire for *one-up-man-ship* and the drive to get head can create a toxic environment where the pain of another person is the pleasure of others. When there is blood in the social waters at work, many times, everyone feeds on gossip in order to keep everyone in their place and maintain the *pecking order*.

Do you know what the *pecking order* is? The phrase *pecking order* is a farm term. I grew up on a farm and I have seen this happen. When chicks are small the strongest ones will find the weakest one and peck them on the head until they kill them. People will do the same thing to their fellow co-workers, family members, and rivals. They will torture them until he or she quits, gives up, gets sick, transfers or kills himself. Some will be so distraught that they will purchase a gun and burst into work places or campuses to kill their persecutors.

Consider one more context where we fear hostile humiliation—family gatherings. The holidays are coming up and some of you are already dreading the family get togethers for this very reason. It is painful experience and some of you are the brunt of the jokes because you follow Jesus. You do not fit in your family's mold of what you ought to be. Holidays can be difficult time, a painful time, a stressful time.

I think the question is: What do you do to try to get free from hostility and humiliation? Where do you go for life? Where do you seek life when hostility and humiliation suck the very life out of you?

We feel the brokenness of the world when hostility and humiliation oppress us and we long to be free. We long for life BUT if we are not careful we will seek life in ungodly ways.

In order to get free, we will get angry. With angry outbursts, we may seek to burst our bonds and find life but what we find in that is only a downward spiral.

In order to get life, we will seek from others what only Christ can give. Like the Israelites in Jeremiah chapter 2, we will seek satisfaction from dry wells/broken cisterns. Like them, we will dig dry wells and we will stick our shovels in the backs of our spouses and friends and ask them to give us life. We will stick our shovels into our work and ask it to give us life and satisfaction only to realize that we are eating dirt. There is no life there. We must go to God's word for life. We must store it in the deep well of our hearts and draw on it for life.

Second observation from this text is the solution. Practically what this means is that when we are reminded that the world is broken and we are spiritually bankrupt we must draw on the riches of God's word stored in the account of our hearts. First, we must store them in our hearts so that we may draw on these riches of grace.

Second, we don't have to beg God to take our case, He already took it in Christ. Now He runs to us with open arms to swallow us up in His love and to defend us. When we plead to God in prayer about the hostility and humiliation we are going through, Christ is our Advocate who pleads with us and for us.

He is our *Kinsman Redeemer* who ultimately took the hostility and humiliation of our debt of sin on the cross. He took the anger of the wrath of God for our sin on the cross and now all we receive is God's love and grace. No promise of man will satisfy or set you free—only the promise of God in Jesus Christ.

No strategy of man will give you life only the free gift of grace purchased at the cross. No humiliation and hostility of people at work or in your family will prosper against you for Christ has taken the ultimate humiliation and hostility for you. Draw on the riches stored in your heart and remind yourself of what Christ has done for you.

So, when you go to that family gathering for the holidays or you go back to work or whatever that environment is where you are regularly humiliated arm YOURSELF with the promise of Christ's work on your behalf. Preach to yourself what Jesus did for you, how much He loves you, and that you belong to the Father in Heaven. Do not go to work or a family gathering with your head held low but with your head held high because you belong to the King. You are a child of God. Remind yourself of the truth by preaching Psalm 27:1 to yourself, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid.*"

II. We should plead for life according to the abundant mercies of our Redeemer (vv. 155-157)

¹⁵⁵ *Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.*

¹⁵⁶ *Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your rules.*

¹⁵⁷ *Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.*

What comes to your mind when you think of the word *salvation*? I think the word *salvation* is one of those biblical words so often used it has lost some of its beauty. I was struck by the hymn writer Frederick William Faber's thoughts on the word *salvation*:

*"What music in that word, music that never tires, music always new, always rousing, yet always resting! It holds all that our hearts would say. It is the sweet vigor in the morning and the contented peace in the evening. It is a song always being sung deep down in the delighted soul. Angelic ears are ravished by it in heaven . . . It is sweet even to [our Eternal Father] out of whose mind is the music of a thousand worlds . . . Saved! . . . It is the rescue from a shipwreck! It is rest in an unimaginable home! It is to lie down forever in the bosom of God, in an endless rapture of insatiable contentment."*⁴

"Saved and salvation" are words we must slow down and consider. Faber captures the beauty of the word but there is also a graveness in to the word *salvation*. R. C. Sproul used to ask about the word *saved* and *salvation*, "*Saved from what?*" In the Old Testament, salvation was mostly a physical experience where one was delivered from sickness, danger, suffering or death. The ultimate expression of salvation is seen in the Israelites deliverance from Egypt—the Exodus. However, the story of redemption played out over and over in the Old Testament. God was constantly saving Israel from judgment and destruction because of their sin of covenant unfaithfulness.

Then in the New Testament, we find the full expression of what *salvation* means. *It is to be saved from the wrath of God for all eternity in Hell and to be saved to spend eternity in the paradise of Heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the One who saved us.*

So, when the psalmist says in v. 155 says, "*Salvation is far from the wicked.*" This is a sad statement. Last Sunday we looked at this contrast of being *near* or *far* from the Lord. It continues in this stanza as well. *Being near* the Lord is *to be saved* and *being far* from the Lord is *to be lost*. The good news is that no matter how far you are from the Lord you are never too far to be saved.

Yet, the last part of v. 155 says something sadder still and something that ought to shake us awake. It says, "*for they do not seek your statutes.*" This phrase is in the *perfect tense of Hebrew* which means it is a fixed pattern in their lives. They are continually moving away from the mercy of the Lord. It means they have always rejected the Lord's mercy and always will. While Scripture is clear there you can never be too far gone to be saved, as was the Apostle Paul who was a persecutor of the church there seems to be a line that you can cross and God will let you go. Romans 1:24 says some of the saddest words in Scripture, "*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts.*" Since they would not say to the Lord, "*Your will be done.*" God has said to them, "*Your will be done.*"

The words of v. 155 act like *defibrillation paddles* on our hearts to shock us back to life. It warns us that there is "a moving away" from the Lord that is displayed as a permanent pattern of rejecting Jesus where God will say to us, "*Your will be done.*" This is bad news and you do not want the Lord to say that *salvation is far from you*. Scripture implores us to seek the Lord while He may be

⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1202.

found and this is the call you should hear this morning. If you have been rejecting Christ, do not wait any longer. Turn and seek the Lord Jesus while you have time.

The good news is the mercy of Christ is great. Look in v. 156, ¹⁵⁶ *Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your rules.* The Lord's mercy is more abundant than the abundance of persecutors that were after the psalmist in v. 157.

So, here is how all of this comes together. Remember the imagery of the courtroom? The idea here is not that we are the decisive actor that who earns our mercy but we pleaded to the One who can defend us against our persecutors and adversaries who stand and accuse us in God's courtroom.

We are not ambulance chasers here. *God is the One who has been chasing us and He runs to His child with His abundant love and mercy that is more than equal the task to oppose every adversary who accuses His children of sin.*

If God is to give us life and salvation, then the captives who are legally accused and held are legally delivered because Jesus Christ is the One who represents us before God. He has fulfilled the demands of the Law by His death in our place and for our sin. Now He pleads our case before God. He is our Advocate. There was more than enough mercy purchased at the cross to defeat every accusation of the Accuser.

As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:33-34, *“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”*

Good news! You do not have to be your own advocate before God. You do not have to proclaim you own righteousness and give God an account of every good thing you have done or intended to do. The fact is you and I will never be able to present our case to God. You will never do enough good things to earn God's mercy and grace and you have no way as sinners to pay for the sins you have committed and will continue to commit. You will never be able to tip the scales of justice in our favor.

The good news is that when you come to Jesus and ask Him to be your Advocate, He takes all of the mercy and grace He has earned and sets it on your side of the scales and that pays your debt of sin and He also sets all of the righteousness He has earned on your side of the scales and they fall in your favor. In other words, when God looks at you, He sees Jesus' righteousness in your place and counts it as yours. Friends, that is good news for we have been given the abundant mercy of Christ. Rejoice in this! Rest in His work on your behalf!

III. We should plead for life according to the righteous justice of our Redeemer (vv. 158-160)

¹⁵⁸ *I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands.*

¹⁵⁹ *Consider how I love your precepts! Give me life according to your steadfast love.*

¹⁶⁰ *The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.*

I believe theologian Christopher Ash is correct when he says about v. 158, that when the psalmist looked at those who were faithless he couldn't help but be appalled and disgusted that they would reject the abundant mercy and love of God.⁵ It shocked him.

Then in v. 159 he says a second time, *“Consider” “Consider how I love your precepts.”* The first time he said *consider or look* was to ask Yahweh to *look on his afflictions* but now he says *consider how I love your word*.

Let's be clear, the psalmist was not sinless. He did not always do the right thing but it was his heart's desire to obey the word of God for in it he found life, hence he says, *“Give me life according to your steadfast love.”*

This was like when Jesus said to Peter after the crowds rejected Jesus teaching in John 6: *Do you want to leave me as well? Then Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”* The psalmist is saying the same thing. Your words are life—they are eternal life for me.

Therefore, he concludes in v. 160 back in the courtroom, *“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”* The phrase *the sum of your word is truth* means that God's word is truth from its very source and from beginning to the very end and at all points in-between. There is not one jot or tittle that is not true.

In other words, this is the summary of the lawyer's argument is that God's word is true. His word justifies us. He declares us righteous because of Christ's work on our behalf. His word is final and there are no appeals that will overturn Yahweh's word. Our Adversary, the Devil, may bring charge after charge but God will say, *“Paid in full by the blood of Christ—this one is mine from now through all eternity. For no one can bring a charge against God's elect for it is God who justifies. No one can condemn you for it is Christ who died in your place and for your sin and he stands and intercedes for you even now.”*

⁵ Christopher Ash, 185-186.

The psalmist did not know that the Apostle Paul was going to write Romans 8 but he knew Romans 8 theology. He knew that just because he was suffering, being persecuted, and accused that Yahweh was pleading His cause.

So, what this means, is that when you and I are going through suffering, affliction, humiliation and hostility and it seems like it will never end, may we not conclude that the word of God has failed. May we with the psalmist confess, even in the midst of our suffering, *"Every one of your righteous rules endures forever."*

And may we say with the Apostle Paul: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Brothers and sisters, as we take the Lord's Supper this morning what we do is take our eyes off of ourselves and consider Christ. Hebrews 12:3-4 says, *"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."* As you take the bread and juice this morning, consider Him. Consider His broken body for your sin. Your sin brought hostility on the Son of God. Consider His humiliation. He was humiliated because of your sin. All of this was done because He considered you His great reward and inheritance. Oh sinner, know that you are loved and renew your covenant with Jesus Christ and this local body of believers this morning.