

What the Lord's Servants Longs For

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Date: 12 July 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Right, well we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning and we're looking forward to hearing Edward again as we have this week and next week back in the Psalms and in the long Psalm that Edward has been leading us through in chunks over recent months.

And we're back this morning to Psalm 119 and we're going to read together at verse 121. 121, that has the heading L N. If you wonder what that is, you'll see each section has a little heading of a funny looking word and these are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet because it's a very carefully crafted Psalm.

This every section, not only does the section begin with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but every line in the section begins with the same letter.

So the Psalmist has thought very, very carefully about how to put this together because he wants us to remember it and he wants us, I suppose, to learn it and certainly to focus attention on his message.

So let's read carefully then at verse 121. I have done what is just and right. Do not leave me to my oppressors.

[1 : 1 5] Give your servant a pledge of good. Let not the insolent oppress me. My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise.

Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love. And teach me your statutes. I am your servant. Give me understanding that I may know your testimonies.

It's time for the Lord to act. For your law has been broken. Therefore, I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore, I consider all your precepts to be right.

I hate every false way. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.

Well, good morning, friends. And I'm very glad to be able to be with you in this way today. Let's turn up Psalm 119, if we may. And as you know, our reading runs from verse 121 to 128.

[2 : 3 5] If you were asked to describe yourself in a short phrase, perhaps using no more than six or eight words, I wonder what you would say.

How would you do it? I'm a nurse on an oncology ward, might be one person. I'm an office worker. I deliver pizzas. I'm a mother of three.

I'm a grandfather of 12. I wonder how you think of yourself. When I was turning 21 and I was graduating from university, I was like so many other young people.

I didn't know what to think of myself or where to go, what to do with my life. So I arranged to go and see a senior Christian man who lived close by to ask his advice. And after we'd talked the matter over for some time, for half an hour or more, and the discussion was obviously coming to an end, he then said to me, let me pray for you.

I said, thank you. So we bowed our heads and he prayed. And I remember nothing about the prayer except for one phrase. He said to the Lord, please, Lord, make clear to your servant what he ought to do.

- [3 : 52] Well, I left the man's house and I said to myself, how extraordinary. This senior godly Christian man, as he prayed for me, referred to me as the Lord's servant.
- I'd never thought of myself like that before. It sounded so honorable, so dignified to be called the Lord's servant. But I think that wiser older man was gently teaching me something, that a Christian needs to learn to think of himself or herself as a servant of the Lord.
- It is indeed an honorable and dignified title. If you were a lady-in-waiting to the queen or a butler to the prince of Wales, you would be in a most honored position.
- But a Christian is a servant of the king of kings. Now, this is the way that our psalmist thinks about himself. It's his self-estimation. Look at verse 122.
- Give your servant. That's a prayer for himself. Give your servant a pledge of good. Verse 124. Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love.
- [5 : 02] Verse 125. I am your servant. So the phrase comes three times just in this short section of the psalm. In fact, it occurs 12 times throughout the psalm in total.
- And while it does speak of the psalmist's view of himself, it speaks even more powerfully of the way he thinks about the Lord. Because he knows that the Lord has committed himself to his servants by an unbreakable covenant.
- Throughout the Bible, the Lord promises his gracious protection and rescue to his servants. So it's a wonderful thing for the servant to be committed to the Lord, but far more wonderful for the servant to know how much the Lord is committed to him.
- Now, this is not a perfect illustration, but just think for a moment about the box-set drama series Downton Abbey. I know it came out years ago, but it was set in the early years of the 20th century.
- You have the great house, Downton Abbey, lived in and ruled over by the noble wealthy family. But equally important to the drama are the family's servants.
- [6 : 14] In fact, the drama is just as much about their lives and their ups and downs as it is about the noble family. And the bond between the servants and his lordship and her ladyship is a very strong bond.
- The servants, at least the better ones amongst them, are devoted to the noble family, and they love them. But the noble family also care deeply about the servants. And when the servants go through their own personal crises, the wealthy family look after them.
- It is a two-way relationship. Now, this is what the Christian life is like. Every Christian is a servant of the Lord. But our service is not drudgery or hard labor.
- It becomes a joy because we serve a master who cares about us and cares for us. In fact, Jesus, in his teaching, goes even further.
- He says to the apostles in John chapter 15, No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends.
- [7 : 22] For all that I have heard from my father, I have made known to you. Now, let's not misunderstand Jesus there. When he says, No longer do I call you servants, what he means is, No longer do I call you merely servants.
- I'm calling you friends as well, because I'm opening up to you my father's will and purpose. I'm letting you into my father's thinking. I'm sharing everything with you.
- A mere servant is not allowed to share his master's thinking, but a friend does share it. Now, Jesus makes it clear in other Bible passages that Christians continue to be his servants, but he gives us this very great honor in addition, that we are counted as servants who are real friends.

Well, let's turn now to our passage in Psalm 119. My title for this morning is this, What the Lord's Servants Long For. Just run your eye down the passage, and you'll see that the psalmist, the Lord's servant, is full of longing.

Verse 121, Don't leave me to my oppressors, he says. Verse 122, Give your servant a pledge of good. I long for it. Verse 123, My eyes long for your salvation.

[8 : 46] Verse 125, He's expressing how much he longs for understanding, for knowledge of the Lord's testimonies. Verse 126, It is time for the Lord to act.

Your law is being broken all around me. Step in, Lord. I long for it. Please intervene. Act. I long for you to sort it all out. What the man is expressing is not only longing, but frustration.

His life is very difficult, and he longs to be rescued from his difficulties. And that is always the Bible's picture of the believer's life.

If you're a Christian, but you have no sense of frustration or longing, you need to wake up and smell some coffee. The Lord's servants throughout the Bible are filled with longing.

Think, for example, of Jesus. Jesus said at one point, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it be accomplished. Or think of Paul.

[9 : 47] I long to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. Better, that is, than living with pressures that I can often scarcely bear. Years ago, there seemed to be some Christians about, in this country at least, who appeared to be completely satisfied with their life and their circumstances.

A Christian man might say, well, I have a good job, a comfortable income. My wife is a sweetie. My children are, on the whole, well-behaved. I have a nice church to belong to, a comfortable home, regular holidays.

All is well for me here, in the lovely home counties of England. I'm completely satisfied with my life. Now, our psalmist could not echo that kind of sentiment.

Perhaps, at one level, it's no bad thing for us, to have COVID virus, to contend with, and the threat of economic collapse, possibly, and worries about food security.

Not to mention, the sidelining of the church, by atheistic secularism. If only, because these things, bring us into line, with the longings, and frustrations, of the Lord's servants, in the Bible.

[10 : 59] What, then, does the Lord's servant, our psalmist, long for? We'll look at this, under two headings. First, he longs for deliverance, for rescue.

Perhaps, verse 1, 2, 3, puts it most clearly. My eyes long, for your salvation, and for the fulfillment, of your righteous promise.

In other words, Lord, you've promised me something, but you have not yet delivered, on your promise. I'm waiting, I'm longing, for your salvation. You might expect him, to have written, my heart longs, or my mind longs, for your salvation.

But he says, my eyes, long for your salvation. He's rather like, a Robinson Crusoe, a man marooned, on a desert island, and all the time, his eyes are scanning, the horizon, to see if a ship, might appear, so as to rescue him, and take him home.

That phrase, my eyes long, literally means, my eyes are full. They're brimming with tears. They're straining, for a sight of the Lord, bringing final rescue, to the psalmist.

[12 : 12] Now what does he need, to be rescued from? Well look at the first two verses, of the section. From oppression. Verse 1, 2, 1, do not leave me, to my oppressors.

Verse 1, 2, 2, let not the insolent, oppress me. Now we've met, these insolent oppressors, many times before, in the course of Psalm 119.

Some of them, are people of power, and authority. So the psalmist, writes in verse 23, that princes, sit plotting, against me. In verse 85, he says, the insolent, have dug pitfalls for me.

In verses 86, and 87, he says, they persecute me, with falsehood. They have almost, made an end of me, on earth. That's verse 87.

And in verse 69, he writes, the insolent, smear me with lies. So this man is living, in a deeply, uncomfortable situation. He is not living, in a happy, smiling, God-fearing, hallelujah, praise the Lord, kind of society.

[13 : 22] He is himself, a God-fearing, God-loving, God-serving man. But he's hated, by many people, who are close to him. Verse 87, suggests, that some people, at least, are actually, trying to kill him.

This is exactly, the situation, that Jesus had to live in. During his, three years of public ministry, he was smeared, with lies, he was hated, he was hounded, to death.

It is the pattern, for the Lord's servant, despised, and rejected, by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted, with grief. This is the life, of our psalmist. And to some degree, at least, it will be our life.

It will be our pattern, if we're true servants, of the rejected savior. Because the servant, is never above his master. The insolent oppressor, one way or another, will smear us with lies.

So how do people speak, about Bible believing Christians, in our own day, in our own society? Just imagine, this kind of conversation, taking place, in the bar, at the house of commons, late in the evening, or perhaps at Holyrood, at the end of the day, where a couple of MPs, get together.

[14 : 37] And one says to the other, do you know, there are still, too many churches, in Scotland, that revere, people like, people like John Knox, and Calvin. In fact, I think we should start, taking down the statues, of Knox in Edinburgh, and other places.

Let's knock them down. What example, are we setting to our young people? We say to our young people, look at this image of Knox, who stood for the truth, in Scotland. How can we encourage, our children, to venerate a man like that?

We should take him down, and put up a statue, of Pontius Pilate. How about him? He got it right, didn't he? What is truth, he said. That was the right question, to ask.

He was speaking, for the 21st century. Pontius Pilate, the patron saint, of uncertainty. Do you know, Alistair, there are churches, in Scotland today, that teach their people, that the Bible, is the truth.

That the Bible, is the word of God. They teach, that a person, either goes to heaven, or to hell. In 2020, can you believe it? The leaders, of these churches, are intellectual brigands.

[15 : 40] We ought to close, those churches down. Verse 69, the insolent, smear me, with lies. Verse 122, let not the insolent, oppress me.

This is what it's like, to be a believer, in every generation. Pressure, can become, intense, especially, pressure, on Christian leaders. So, what does our psalmist, long for?

he longs, to be delivered, from this intense pressure. Verse 123, I'm longing, for the fulfillment, of your righteous promise. Your promise, to rescue me, and save me.

Now, let's pause, for a moment, and notice, a particular thing, in the first half, of verse 122. The psalmist writes, give your servant, a pledge, of good.

Now, what is a pledge? Well, a pledge, is a firm promise, very often, a tangible promise, made by a person, who is committed, to following through, on that promise.

- [16 : 45] A good example, would be, an engagement ring. A man, gives to a woman, his fiance, a valuable ring. It's valuable, it's not toy jewelry, made of cheap glass, it's made of something precious, precious metal, mounted with gemstones.
- It's valuable, because it represents, a valuable promise. In giving the woman, her ring, the man is saying to her, I promise, to marry you.
- I'm not going to leave you, in the lurch. I'm not going to cast eyes, on another woman. And so, every time she looks, at her ring, her heart is reassured, that the man, she has come to love, is going to follow through, on his promise.
- The fulfillment, of the promise, lies in the future. But the pledge, which is the ring, assures her, that he is going, to marry her. A pledge, is a sure promise, that guarantees, future fulfillment.
- Look again, at verse 122. Give your servant, a pledge, of good. What is the good thing, that he longs for? Well, there it is, in the next verse.
- [17 : 55] My eyes, long for, your salvation. He's asking the Lord, then, to give him a pledge, so as to assure him, that he will be rescued, from the cauldron, of oppression, that he's currently suffering.
- Now, just think, big history, big terms, big eras of history, for a moment. When was this man writing? He was writing, six or eight hundred years, before Christ.
- So, what was he, in essence, praying for? He was praying, for salvation. He was praying, therefore, for Christ, to come and rescue him, because Christ, is the bringer of salvation.
- Now, we people, looking back, we can have a clarity, of understanding, which the psalmist, could not have, as he peered forward, into history. His perception, was dim, because Christ, had not come, but ours is clear.
- God has indeed, answered that prayer, of verse 122. The pledge of good, prayed for by our psalmist, has been given. It is the death, and resurrection, of the Lord Jesus.
- [19 : 03] His death, assures us, that our debt of sin, has been paid, in full, and his resurrection, assures us, that the gateway, to eternal life, has been flung open, to all believers.
- Jesus, is the pledge, of good, that God has given, to all his people. Just as the engagement ring, is the pledge, and promise, of future marriage.
- So the death, and resurrection, of Jesus, is the pledge, and promise, of God, assuring us, of our future salvation. Assuring us, that God will, follow through, on what he has promised.
- Yes indeed, we long, to be saved. We long, to be delivered, from the sense, of oppression, that we feel, as modern society, and the liberal churches, turn away, from the gospel.
- But the pledge, of our salvation, has indeed, been delivered to us. And we can wait, with absolute confidence, for God, in the words of verse, one, two, three, to fulfill, his righteous promise.
- [20 : 08] So let's keep our eyes, scanning the horizon. Because the rescuer, who came, two thousand years ago, to assure us, of our salvation, by his death, and resurrection, will one day return, and take us, to our eternal home, where oppression, is no more, and our salvation, will be complete, in that eternal realm.
- Let's try to be, as clear as we possibly can, in our thinking, about the chronology, of all this. How it works out, in history. Our position today, is not the same, as the psalmist's position.
- The psalmist, is looking forward, to a pledge, of his salvation, to be given to him. This pledge, of salvation, was wonderfully given, by God, several hundred years, after Psalm 119, was written.

It was given, in the form, of the death, and resurrection, of Jesus. We therefore, at our point, in history, don't need to pray, for a pledge, of salvation, to be given, to us.

God has given it, to the world, two thousand years ago, when he gave us Jesus. And we, who are Christians, have been given, a further pledge, of salvation, in the gift, of the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 23] Who, as Paul the Apostle, explains, is like a wax seal, stamped upon us, to assure us, that we belong, to God forever. So the psalmist's prayer, of verse 122, has been answered.

The pledge, has been given. But verse 123, still applies, to our situation today. Our eyes, are still longing, for God's salvation, to be fully revealed, and brought to us.

We're not yet, in the new creation. We are not yet, in our resurrection bodies. We're all falling to pieces, aren't we? Bit by bit. Even if you're young, and healthy, just look in the mirror, and you'll see, that you're not, what you were, five years ago.

To put it in a nutshell, we who are Christians, are saved. We are saved, by Christ. Whose death, and resurrection, and gift of the Holy Spirit, are an unbreakable, pledge to us.

But we're still waiting, for our full, and final salvation. That's why we pray, thy kingdom come. We pray it, because the kingdom, has not yet, fully come. Paul the apostle, is so helpful, in all this.

[22 : 33] He teaches us, how to relate, the present, to the future. For example, here's what he says, in Romans chapter 8, written 20 or 30 years, after the death, and resurrection of Jesus. He writes, in this hope, we were saved.

Now hope, that is seen, is not hope, for who hopes, for what he sees. But if we hope, for what we do not see, we wait for it, with patience.

We're waiting, we're longing, for our salvation. The apostle Peter, is equally clear, about the present, and the future. He writes, he writes in his second letter, chapter 3, verse 13, but according to his promise, we are waiting, for new heavens, and a new earth, where righteousness, dwells.

We're waiting, we're longing, we're aching, for our salvation, longing to be with Christ, in the kingdom, where all is made new. But for the moment, in this old world, the insolent, oppressed the Lord's servants.

Lies are told about us, and lies are told about our gospel. That's the package. That is the reality, of the Christian life. But friends, the new world is coming. We are waiting, to see the kingly glory, of God himself, and of the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 54] So there's the first thing. The Lord's servant longs, for rescue, for deliverance, which is coming. It is promised. Now secondly, the Lord's servant longs, is for understanding.

I don't mean, to be understood, but so that he should understand, the Lord's way and will. And this second longing, for understanding, is very closely related, to the first longing. We can see the two longings, together, in verse 1, 2, 4.

Deal with your servant, according to your steadfast love, and teach me, your statutes. Now the first half, of that verse, is more or less, repeating the request, of verse 1, 2, 3.

Deal with your servant, according to, your covenanted, promised, steadfast love. In other words, deliver on your promise, to rescue me. And, teach me, your statutes.

What he means is, teach me, what they really mean. Yes, he would say, I know them at one level. I can recite the ten commandments, off by heart. But so could a trained parrot.

[25 : 02] The psalmist, would probably go on to say, I know the books of Moses, pretty well. The Old Testament law. In fact, I'm a teacher, of Moses. But what I long to do, is to understand Moses, better, more deeply.

Look at the next verse. Verse 125. I am your servant. Yes, I am indeed. I rejoice, to be your servant. But I don't want, to be a silly, narrow-minded, block-headed servant.

I want to serve you, with a real understanding, of your mind and purpose. So, verse 125. Give me understanding. I want to know, your testimonies. Know them, in the sense of being, able to penetrate, more deeply, into their meaning, and their application.

Now, friends, let me ask you this. Do you have, this kind of hunger, and thirst, and longing, to know, and to understand, the Lord's teaching, more deeply. Think of yourself, when you're physically hungry.

Just imagine, you might be hungry, at this moment, but just think of what it's like, to be physically hungry. You haven't eaten for hours. You're starting, to say things like, if I don't eat, three bacon rolls, in the next five minutes, I shall probably die.

[26 : 14] The truth is, that you probably won't die, but you're so hungry, you say something like that. Now, isn't that roughly, what our psalmist is saying, in verse one, two, five, in relation, to the Lord's words.

Give me understanding, I must know your testimonies, I'm hungry for them, teach me, or I shall die. Let's ask the Lord, to give us a hunger, for his words, like that hunger, and longing, of verse one, two, five.

And what is it, that the psalmist, is so hungry for? What is he demanding, of the Lord? The answer is, understanding. Understanding, the depth, and the force, and the implications, of the Bible's teaching.

Now, a ten-year-old, in Sunday school, can learn off by heart, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the 23rd Psalm, and other things, by setting heart and mind, on learning them.

But understanding them, will only develop, as the years go on, and the ten-year-old, grows more mature, and continues, to read the Bible, thoughtfully. And if we are hungry, to understand the Bible, our understanding, will keep on growing.

[27 : 25] This is wonderful. It's not as though, we reach, a certain age, somewhere in the middle of life, where our brain, sets, like a lump of concrete, and becomes incapable, of further movement.

No, our brains, have endless numbers, of files, inside, which can be opened up, as long as the hunger, for understanding, is there. If we pray, with our psalmist, give me understanding, the Lord will answer, that prayer.

He loves to answer, that kind of prayer. And it means, that our whole lifetime, becomes a developing, journey, of discovery. Discovering the treasures, of the Bible, and thus discovering, more and more, of the author, of the Bible.

It's not just, about knowing truth. It's about knowing him. But we're not like, a sportsman, who gets to the age, of 30 something, and then has to hang up, his boots, and look wistfully, at the photos, of his glory days.

No, the Christian goes on, discovering the treasures, of God's truth, and the glory, of the gospel. Friends, let's get into the habit, of praying, that urgent prayer, of verse 1, 2, 5.

[28 : 35] I'm your servant, give me understanding, that I may know, your testimonies. Why not pray that, each time you sit down, to read your Bible, by yourself at home. Give me understanding Lord.

And the last, three verses, of our section, teach us more, about this longing, for understanding, of the Bible. Look at verses, 1, 2, 6, and 7, and 8. There's a surprising, word there.

The word, therefore. Why therefore? Let me read. It is time, for the Lord to act, for your law, has been broken. Therefore, I love your commandments, above gold.

Does that seem, a little strange? Why does the thought, expressed in verse 126, impel the psalmist, to love God's, law and teaching? Well, I think the logic, is this.

The psalmist, looks around him, at contemporary society, and it grieves him deeply. God's law, is being broken, every day, by people, high and low, rich and poor.

[29 : 38] He sees robbery, violence, greed, selfishness, at every level, just as we do today. He sees the suffering, and the sadness, that is caused by sin. And his own, painful experience, of his contemporary society, drives him, into his Bible, and makes him realize, just how valuable it is.

And why is it so valuable? Because it teaches him, right from wrong. Look at verse 128. It's the Lord's words, that teach him what is right, and enable him, to distinguish, the right way, from every false way, which he comes to hate.

And it's just the same, for us today. It's only the Bible, that will enable us, to understand, the corruptions, in society, and the selfishness, of the human heart, including of course, our own hearts.

The secularist, with a conscience, may be able, to propose, certain helpful measures, to alleviate, the worst abuses, in our society's life. But it's only the Bible, that will give us, a profound analysis, of the human heart.

It's only the Bible, that will open up to us, a true view, of the delight and joy, of having our minds, renewed, in the image, of our creator. In other words, a true view, of living, a robust, honest, loving, truthful, human life.

[31 : 05] And it's only the Bible, that will teach us, to hate, every false way, as verse 1, 2, 8, puts it. So friends, if we're Christians, let's rejoice, to be servants, of the Lord.

What an honor, for us it is, to be his servant. And let's develop, these longings, of the Lord's servant. First, the longing, for our final salvation, at the return, of the Lord Jesus.

Let's not get, too comfortable, in this world. Let's not, pat our bellies, and say, all is well. All is not well. The whole world, is in the grip, of the evil one, as John the Apostle, puts it.

It is for the moment, but it won't always be. Let's keep scanning, the horizon, because the Lord, is on his way. And then secondly, let's develop our longing, to understand the scriptures, and to love them, above fine gold.

They are our source, of revelation, from heaven. Only they, will teach us, about humanity, about our final destiny, in salvation, or destruction. Only the scriptures, will assure us, that the God, who has given us, his pledge of salvation, will finally, and gloriously, deliver, on his promise.

[32 : 29] Let's bow our heads, and we'll pray. Our glorious God, we thank you, for opening up to us, in the Bible, a true view, of salvation, and judgment.

Help us to long, for our heavenly home. Oh, that the Lord Jesus, might come soon. That we might see him, in his glory, and be welcomed, into his eternal presence.

We ask it, in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.