

Psalm 119: 121-128; "Be surety for Your servant", A Communion Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 30th, 2008, in the Morning Worship Service.

The Psalmist David here prays to God concerning the oppression of spirit that he feels; his soul being afflicted by the words and actions of men who regarded God's law as void; empty of authority and significance to them. He was zealous for the honor and glory of God, and because of this, men who were proud were seeking to bring him down from his position as king. He prays, "Do not leave me to my oppressors." "Be surety for your servant for good." There is perhaps nothing more disturbing to a Christian than to have an oppressed spirit, a spirit oppressed by people around him who are attempting to live in such a way that they show by their words and actions that they will not submit to God or His Word. Sometimes they are even people who profess to know God and are thinking that they are serving God through their oppression of a true believer. What is the true believer in Jesus Christ to do? It is apparent from these verses that he is to pray and to make supplication to God that God will give him the grace to learn practically how to glorify Him in such situations that have brought this oppression. We can see from these verses that in terms of the cause of righteousness that he was doing justice and righteousness. And so we need to consider this truth in relation to ourselves, that when this is the case that it is not always God's will to deliver the faithful Christian from his oppressors immediately. This does not mean that we cease to pray and cry to God for that deliverance, but God has important things to teach every oppressed Christian; things which are very valuable. And since we have a whole Bible to draw from let me name 3 of the things which the Christian who is oppressed, learns about this great salvation which is ours, by looking by faith to God. 1st - The Christian who is oppressed, when he prays, will learn much about God becoming his surety through Jesus Christ our Lord. 2nd - The Christian who is oppressed, when he prays, will learn much about God's mercy and will be instructed in how to be holy in such a situation. 3rd - The Christian who is oppressed, when he prays, will learn much about how God Himself acts, when men despise his law, to establish his people's love for His commandments. So let's open up this idea a little more before we come to the Lord's table to partake of His Supper.

1st - The Christian who is oppressed, when he prays, will learn much about God becoming his surety through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Verses 121-122)

David cries out to God concerning his oppressors, "Do not leave me to them; do not let them oppress me." What does it mean to be oppressed anyway? The Dictionary says that when someone is an oppressor he tries, "to control or rule in a harsh or cruel way, and he causes others to feel burdened in spirit." If you

will turn with me to Deuteronomy 26: 6, you will find an example of great oppression affecting a whole nation of people. It says, "But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us." "Then we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and looked on our oppression." "So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders." "He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey...." You will remember, from the book of Exodus, how it was Pharaoh the king of Egypt who was the oppressor of God's people. And all of the Egyptians were doing his bidding. His bidding was to oppress the people of Israel. But here we find the Lord becoming the surety for his people Israel. The children of Israel were in bondage there in Egypt. They needed the Lord to undertake on their behalf so that they would be delivered from this oppression. It was oppression to be forced to work so rigorously. The Egyptian taskmasters forced them to work very hard, even having to make bricks without straw. It was very oppressive to their spirits to know that they were slaves and could not worship and live to freely work and serve the Lord in accordance with His Word. Oppression of spirit is when a person feels forced by others to think a certain way, and when they are forced to do things which they would not freely choose to do for themselves.

When the children of Israel cried to God because of these oppressions, the Lord did listen to them. The Lord did undertake to become their surety. This was in accordance with the covenant that He had made with them. The Lord does undertake to be surety for all those who are in covenant with Him. If you turn over to Exodus 3: 23 you will see this. It says there, "Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died." "Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage." "So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." "And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them." A surety is one who is willing to undertake to pay off the debts which someone who is unfaithful or too poor to pay, cannot pay. Here in this passage, God saw that the children of Israel, His covenant people were too weak to bring themselves out of bondage. He acknowledged them and promised to undertake for them to save them from their oppressors. He would undertake to supply what they lacked in accordance with His faithfulness and His eternal purposes. In the book of Proverbs, chapter 6, it says, "My son, if you become surety for your friend, if you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, you are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth." "So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; for you have come into the hand of your friend: Go humble yourself; plead with your friend, give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of hunter, and like a bird

from the hand of the fowler." And in Proverbs 11: 15 it says, "He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure." There is much wisdom being communicated to us here that we need to ponder. It is financial wisdom not to stand surety for another unless you are willing to suffer. It is not good to rush into financial commitments that we have not thought through the implications of; especially undertaking the debts of another. But we must seriously ponder this at this hour; the Lord Jesus Christ was willing to stand spiritual surety for strangers; for sinners such as you and I. He was willing to pay the spiritual debt that you and I owe, the debt which we owe because of sin. He thought the matter through very thoroughly.

If you will turn over to Hebrews Chapter 7, verse 17 and we will see how the Lord Jesus' standing surety is linked to the New Covenant. Here the writer of Hebrews is comparing the Levitical priesthood with the priesthood of Melchizedek and he says, "For He testifies: (that is the writer of this Psalm 110 testifies) 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" "For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." "And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath by Him who said to Him: 'The Lord has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' ", by so much more has Jesus become a surety of a better covenant." You can see here that there was a real lack in the sufficiency of the Old Covenant law to save men from their bondage and oppression because of sin. The defect was not in God or in the things that he commanded be done by the Old Testament priesthood. That which was lacking was a perfect priest to bring the acceptable sacrifice. There had to be a New and Better Covenant made by God by means of a different Priesthood in order that men might be saved and be made perfect in righteousness, and have all of their many sins entirely and completely forgiven. "The law made nothing perfect." We in the New Covenant, it says, "have a better hope" of the realization of these things in Jesus Christ our Lord. We draw near to God through Him, realizing the merits of His body broken on the cross and His blood shed on behalf of many for the remission of sins. Jesus is the surety or the guarantee of these things. It is not that no one was saved under the Old Covenant law. Those who were saved were saved not by trusting in their priests and the sacrifices that they made, for themselves and for the sins of the people. They were saved by looking in faith at what those sacrifices represented, which was yet to come. They were saved by believing that their offering of sacrifices was pointing to the Christ who would come and die for sinners and for sins. They, in faith, were looking forward to the time when the Lamb of God would come who would be the fulfillment of all these sacrifices which they made, knowing that the blood of bulls and goats and rams

and lambs could never of themselves take away one sin. It was only a pictorial image and representation of what was needed, which was the shedding of blood. The blood of our high priest is most precious. The high-priest who ministers perfectly on behalf of fallen sinners, whether they are Jew or Gentile, must be of a greater priesthood and the sacrifice must be of infinite and eternal value in the sight of Almighty God. According to God's purpose it must be a sacrifice equal to the whole world of fallen men. He must be a surety indeed, who would pay the price to discharge all the debts of sin that we owe and to completely fill up all the obligations to obedience which we have failed to accomplish. Do you now see the greatness of what Christ has done for you, O sinner? He who was willing to become your surety suffered greatly because of your sins and disobedience. But He has satisfied your sin-debt and paid the price. This is why you can pray about being delivered from the oppression of men against you and find an answer waiting. This is why you can know the reality of Christ's peace and grace coming to you at such a time as this. Do you see the greatness of what Christ has done for you now that you have become one of His saints by faith in Him? Then you should come to His Table this morning and give Him the calves of your lips. You should render the sacrifices of praise and offerings of thanksgiving for the greatness of this grace and the power to live the Christian life.

Now 2ndly - We need to understand this morning that The Christian who is oppressed, when he prays, will learn much about God's mercy and will be instructed in how to be holy in such a situation. (Verses 123-125)

Verse 123 says, "My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word." "Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes." When he speaks of his eyes failing from seeking God's salvation, he is not speaking of conversion to Christ or understanding how he might know God. He already knows God personally. King David is rather speaking of the salvation which would come to him when he was delivered from the oppression of men. He wanted more than anything else to be able to do the right thing in relation to these men who were oppressing him so that God would be glorified in everything that he did and said in relation to them in the sight of God and in the sight of the subjects in his kingdom. By the way, this is often the greatest test of the sanctification of any New Testament Christian as well. We must ask ourselves the question this morning as we are coming to the Lord's table once again: Am I acting and reacting in a just and righteous way before God to the various situations of difficulty and distress which He has permitted to come to me? Am I acting and reacting in a just and righteous way before men as I live my life with a spirit that has felt deeply distressed and oppressed because of the way that some person or some people have treated me in the past?

What am I to do about this? Well the Psalmist David sets us a good example. He doesn't become angry and indignant about it. He doesn't return evil for their evil. He doesn't fight fire with fire. He realizes that ultimately that he is in this situation because God is sovereign and that He has permitted it for David's good. A man who believes in God's sovereignty will always pray first, before he ever acts in important matters, so David prays in verse 124, "Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy." That is how we are to view ourselves in a situation like this; as God's servant. What would You have me to do, O God? How would you have me to speak and to conduct myself? What do you want me to learn from this, O Lord? What are you trying to teach me practically from Your Word? "Deal with me in mercy, teach me Your statutes, for I am Your servant. I stand here waiting to do Your bidding. He knows that he must have God's salvation to be delivered from the oppression of man and from the oppression which his spirit feels because of what they have done and are doing to him. Let me ask you if you are proceeding in this way in the situations that the Lord leads you into? There is nothing wrong with asking God to deliver you from oppressive men or from oppression of spirit. But when you ask Him for this mercy will you not also ask him to teach you his statutes as you go through it? That is being God's servant. That is how you bring glory to Him.

There may be some here this morning who feel this oppression and you are not dealing with it rightly. The Bible says that you are to love your enemies and bless those who curse you. It says to do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5: 44) But you are having trouble with this because you do not see those who have sinned against you, those who have oppressed your spirit, coming to ask forgiveness for their faults and sins, and so in your mind you believe that you cannot forgive them. You will not forgive them until they come to you and confess their sins, and you intend to hold their sins against them. But I believe that this is not how the Lord Jesus would want it, and it is not the example which He set for us. I would like you to turn over to Luke 23 and verse 32 with me for a look at the example of our Lord Jesus. I believe that this is the kind of instruction that He gives to those suffering under the oppressions of men and oppression of spirit because of it. "There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death." "And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left." "Then Jesus said, 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'" "And they divided His garments and cast lots." "And the people stood looking on." "But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved other; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ the chosen of God.'" "The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.'"

Now, we need to take notice of the fact that even when Jesus was being crucified; even we He was being mistreated, mocked, and sneered at, that He was not thinking so much of Himself, but of those who were sinning against him and their being forgiven for their sins in the sight of His holy Father. "Father forgive them for they do not know what they do." This is the right way of handling severe oppression of spirit. Here we find the holy manhood of our Lord Jesus being insulted over and yet our Lord Jesus prays that these sins would be forgiven them. No doubt it is true that He was not praying for those who were sinning the sin unto death among them; those who knew that He was the Messiah and still mocked and insulted him and wanted Him killed. He was praying for those who were sinning in ignorance of the fact that He was the Lord of glory. He was praying for those Elect among them that these sins would be forgiven them, that they would escape the snare of the Devil, and be converted later on under the ministry and preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost; three thousand of them in one day. You see, the lesson that we need to learn and to remember this morning is the patience of our Lord Jesus Christ toward sinners who were directly sinning against Him. We need to remember the willingness of the Lord Jesus to love even when mistreated and to think about how people could be brought to a right mind and reconciled to God and ultimately to Himself.

Each of us who are believers should recall, this morning, what we were like before we were converted to Jesus Christ. Each of us should think of how it was that God showed us mercy when we did not deserve it. We prayed to God and asked for mercy, but that was because we had been convinced that there was mercy that awaited us and it would be given to us if we believed in Jesus Christ. We must confess that God was very patient with us and very kind toward us when we were evil and ungrateful men. And now that we are those who have come to know God, we still find that it is very necessary that we pray the way that Psalmist prayed here in verse 124, "Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy. We must ask ourselves the question this morning if we who have been shown mercy are showing mercy to others in the same way that He showed it to us. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," it says in Matthew 5: 7. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy." "Mercy triumphs over judgment," it says in James 2: 13. So let us remember the Lord Jesus this morning. Let us remember the judgment of God that He willingly fell under so that we as believers in Him might find mercy and pardon for all of our sins and might show mercy and give pardon to those who sin against us. Let us now come down front to partake of His Supper.

3rd - The Christian who is oppressed, when he prays, will learn much about how God Himself acts, when men despise his law, to establish his people's love for His commandments. So let's open up this idea a

little more before we come to the Lord's table to partake of His Supper. (Verses 126-128)

"It is time for You to act, O Lord, For they have regarded Your law as void." "Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes than fine gold!" "Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way." Here we see the oppressed believer, having taken his stand for truth and righteousness, and finding himself suffering for it, and oppressed in his spirit; we find him praying that God might act on his behalf. David believed that it was time for God to act because he could do nothing either by his personal power or his kingly authority to prevent these men whom he is thinking about from "making void God's law." This applies to us as well. We must remember that we are always in God's hands as believers and that is the best place to be. He is well able to undertake to deliver us from evil. The Lord will act and we should pray that He would. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." (2 Peter 2: 9) Let us ask ourselves before we partake of these elements today, whether we have reason to believe that the Lord is delivering us out of the temptations that come to us? The temptations to become bitter and unforgiving toward people who oppress our spirit. The temptations to take matters of justice into our own hands and to seek our own revenge. The temptations to compromise and to become sensual and worldly because we don't see people around us living a godly life. As we look at our text here, we see that these things that happened to David did not embitter him in relation to God or his faith. They made him cling to God all the more closely. These who oppressed his spirit may regard God's law as void, but he loves God's Word and His commandments all the more when he sees their disregard. "Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes than fine gold!"

Truly this is an hour in which we determine to proclaim that which is most precious to us. We here gather to remember our Lord's death and resurrection. We are here gathered to remember as it says in Isaiah 53: 7, that Jesus was "oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth." This is how God acts in relation to sinful men. He acted to send His dear and precious Son to sinful men; the One who was of infinite value to Himself. He acted to "deliver Him up for us all; all who would believe in Him. He acts to bring them the gospel and if they reject that, they will reject His mercy coming to them. But His grace is even stronger and more powerful than men's rejection of His Son and the truth, when He chooses to show mercy and to save a person. Let us always remember that when the Lord Jesus suffered on our behalf he was oppressed and afflicted, but He did not open His mouth to utter one word of protest. He was led as it says in verse 8, "as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." Why? Because He knew that this was the only way that you and I could be saved, and He

intended to be our surety. God knew what He was doing, for He out of love for us, even while we were yet sinners, sent His only Begotten Son. And Christ did what He did in His sufferings of being oppressed, with the purpose and the intention that the power of sin's oppression be broken over us, and we not have to bear it forever in hell. But when he permits oppression of spirit in any of His saints, he does so in order that we might learn and might be taught to repent and show others that same kind of patience that He has shown to us.

The question that each of us must ask ourselves as we partake of the Supper is, are we learning this? Can we say with Jesus, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do?" Can we say with Stephen when he was being stoned, and Saul (who was to become the great Apostle Paul) was standing by approving and holding the garments of those who were stoning Stephen, "Lord do not charge them with this sin?" This is why we need fresh supplies of grace to work in our heart. May God bless this ordinance to us. The Lord acts sovereignly to save, but He often uses the means of kind and loving saints to show sinners their need of Him. If we understand this we will pray to learn these things practically. And let us repent of all our sins of worldliness and pride and learn to pray from a humble spirit as it says in 1 Peter 1: 17: "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." It is because of Christ that we can say and know that we love God's commandments more than gold, even than fine gold. It is because of Christ's powerful grace at work in our lives that we can say, "Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way."