

**Psalm 119: 41-48; “So I Shall Have an Answer”, A Communion Sermon prepared by
Pastor Paul Rendall, Delivered on August 4th, 2019,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The Psalmist by his prayers in these verses, shows us how utterly dependent every believer is upon God for a continuing supply of mercy to come to him so that he might be delivered from the reproach of men and glorify God in his words and deeds in a life of faith and obedience. Every Christian is entirely dependent upon God's mercy to make progress in holiness. So the question which I will attempt to answer from this text is this – What should a Christian pray for and hope for, in relation to God's mercy? I think that we can find 4 things that the Christian hopes for, and prays for, in relation to the mercy of God.

1st – The Christian hopes and prays that God will show him mercy by giving him an answer for those who reproach him. (verses 41 and 42)

“Let your mercies come also to me, O Lord – Your salvation according to Your word.” “So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in your word.” As we read the words of the prayer which introduces this Psalm, we should understand that not all of the mercies of God's salvation which are bestowed upon us as believers, come to us automatically. However, all of the blessings that we receive in living the Christian life come to us according to the Lord's faithfulness. He is a sovereign King. He distributes His mercies and favors as He pleases. This is why each Christian must learn to develop their prayer life. Some Christians are lazy spiritually. They do not develop a prayer life unless they are forced to it by adverse circumstances in their lives. But you should understand that this is not at all pleasing to the Lord. A Christian must not think that because they have been saved and have had all the spiritual blessings of Christ's work bestowed upon them, that somehow they do not need to grow in regard to that salvation. A Christian should not often have to be forced by God's discipline to grow up in the Christian life. They should be pursuing growth and maturity in the Christian life at all times.

When you begin to pursue holiness, you come to understand that you need the wisdom and grace and power of Christ to do many things every day; even in the ordinary activities of the day. Besides this, there are many lessons to learn in the Christian life. There are many areas of sin in our lives that need to be addressed, and there is a path of liberty that is set before us to walk upon. Let us ask ourselves, first of all, if we have entered the kingdom of God and whether we are walking on this path of righteousness? Have we seen the sinfulness of our fallen nature? Have we believed in the gospel? Have we received Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin? It is then that we come to know that we are forgiven, and that we have received grace, and that we will be receiving grace from God every day. We come to learn that there is grace in which we stand, and then there is the grace in which we walk and live to God's glory. In the first, we are perfect and complete in Christ. Nothing can be added to the imputed righteousness of Christ, and nothing taken away from it. The second, related to our walk with Christ, is something that we must pray that we will not receive His grace in vain.

Much will depend on your responding to the grace that you are given. You do not want to be ashamed before Him when you stand before Him at the last judgment. We are taught here in these verses that we must strive, not only to enter the kingdom, but we must labor in prayer to God, that we will be useful and fruitful in his service. The Christian is not always able to have an answer for the one who is reproaching him. But he prays to be able to do so. A Christian is one who is often reproached by unbelievers, either secretly or openly. A reproach is when someone is criticizing you or bringing a charge against you, for the things that you do or say, or how you do or say them. A Christian will sometimes be reproached because they are trying to do what is

right according to God's holy Word. When you are doing and keeping God's commandments, and when you are sharing the truth of God's Word with others, you will sometimes be spoken against. In Luke 6: 26, however, Jesus says, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." When you speak the truth of God's Word, and you live the truth, by keeping God's commandments, you will sometimes be reproached, and perhaps even reviled. If all men speak well of you, it means that you have compromised with the truth of God's Word at some point.

People do not like being told that the things that they are doing wrong. They do not like being shown, by your good example, that they have neglected or disobeyed God's Word. They will talk to others who they think will sympathize with them. They will call faithful Christians fools for living in accordance with God's Word and His commandments. They cannot feel comfortable or free when they are around us because they know that we are trying to serve God, and they do not want to be bound by His service. They may say cruel and cutting things to us, or they may try to prove that they are servants of God just as much as we are, because they go church and take the sacraments. And yet they will not live by faith in God's Word. They have no desire to obey it in all its particulars. They believe that they are forgiven by being religious in some particular way. But conversion to Christ, and being born again by God's Spirit, and living in accordance with God's Word; these are foreign and unpleasant ideas to them.

At this point the great temptation is for the believer to become self-righteous and simply to speak against them as well. But the Psalmist David takes a different tack. He knows a more excellent way. He prays, "Let your mercies come also to me". Other believers have found this godly way of response; let me find it when I am reproached. "So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your Word." What is the way of the godly person? It is to study God's Word with the prayer in his heart, that God would give him an answer to the one who reproaches him. God's Word will give you the answer. The answer is often found in the actions which Jesus commends in such circumstances. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

In Luke 6, after Jesus had said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you," He followed it up by saying this – "But I say to you who hear; love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also." "And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either." "Give to everyone who asks of you." "And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back." "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." Ask yourself if this is you? If it is not, there is some need for repentance on the horizon, and especially in light of the Lord's Supper which you are about to partake of.

The answer is also found in praying about the words that you can say to those who reproach you. In 1st Peter 3, verses 14-18, we find these important words – "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed." "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God..."

You see, this is how we who believe were brought to God. It was by the sufferings of Christ and faith in the finished work of Christ; that He has obeyed God's law on our behalf and He has suffered for our sins on the cross. And this is also how we teach others about the grace of God in Christ. By suffering for doing what is right and praying that we would be able to give an answer to the person who reproaches us. This is why we pray for God's mercies to come to us. You will not find the ability to do these difficult things through the observations of your mind upon our

own abilities. But if you will remember that God's mercy is found in Jesus Christ and the gift of His grace, you will pray to be able to give an answer to those who reproach you. Our text in verse 41 says – "Let your mercies, that is those mercies which come through Jesus Christ, "come also to me, O Lord". And so you will find the strength to do these things to the glory of God, through praying to God for more of the grace our Lord Jesus Christ.

2nd – The Psalmist hopes and prays that God will not utterly take His Word out of his mouth. (verse 43)

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances." You and I, who are believers in Jesus, are those who are hoping that these ordinances, the preaching of the word, and prayer, and faith that God will do us good, that all that He has promised in us will come to pass in our lives. We are hoping that that these ordinances will establish us as faithful servants in both word and deed. In Job 36, verse 15 Elihu when he speaks of the poor Christian who is not a hypocrite, but is struggling with their sin, he says – "God delivers the poor in their affliction, and opens their ears in oppression." The Psalmist David in our text was going to be delivered because he was crying for help when God bound him up in his discipline. David was trusting in God's ordinances. This is why we come to the Lord's table once again today. We are trusting in the efficacy of Christ's work on our behalf; in all of the effective power of what Christ has done for us, to be applied to our heart and mind, and that He will not leave us to ourselves. We draw near to this table realizing that we have fallen short in many ways and we need to be cleansed and renewed in our heart, and to feed upon the faithfulness of our Savior. We want to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into light, the One who has taken us out of the kingdom of Satan and has placed us in the kingdom of the Son of His love.

This is what all true believers love to do. They love to remember Christ's love for them and they would speak of it to others. They would speak of the power of Christ's grace in their lives. God will bless His ordinances when we are hoping that Christ's grace will come to us. Psalm 51: 10 and following say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit." "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You." Each of us, as we approach this table should examine our hearts and our lives to see if there is uncleanness or a divided heart that really wants sin instead of Christ. Let us renounce all sin that we may have toyed with, and pray to God that He would renew us by pouring out fresh supplies of grace, mercy, and peace upon our lives.

3rd – The Psalmist hopes and prays that he will be able to keep God's law continually and walk at liberty. (verses 44-46)

This is the desire of the renewed heart and mind; to "keep God's law continually and walk at liberty." We only have true liberty when by the Spirit's power we are being led away from sin and we are set free to serve God in righteousness. There is true freedom and real satisfaction in the keeping of God's commandments out of a thankful heart. When you see what Christ has done for you, and when you see how much You owe Him, it is the reasonable and loving response to desire to "keep God's Word, His law forever and ever", as it says in verse 44. Liberty is not found in leaning upon our own understanding. It is found by walking in truth and obedience to God's commandments by the grace of Christ. Sometimes a believer will be reproached because they are not doing the right thing; they are neglecting their duty, or they are not acting as a Christian should, and in this, they should be reproached.

I think of Jonah, when he deliberately disobeyed the Lord and did not go to preach to the people of Nineveh, as the Lord had commanded him. He was not "walking at liberty", even though he thought that he was. In his supposed liberty, he took a ship in the opposite direction to Tarshish. He then had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship to sleep so that he could

forget about the Lord's commandment to him. Sinful liberty will try to put conscience to sleep. Jonah was able to go fast asleep in the midst of terrible storm. His conscience should have been reproaching him for his disobedience, but he had rationalized his obedience away, by means of his conscience. He put his conscience to sleep by justifying his own reasons for his disobedience. And so he had to be rebuked and reproached by the pagan sea captain. The captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper?" "Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." The men on the ship had cast lots to find out the reason that all this trouble had come upon them, and the lot fell upon Jonah. They said to him, "Please tell us!" "For whose cause is this trouble come upon us?" "What is your occupation?" "And where do you come from?" "What is your country?" "And of what people are you?" And Jonah said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then it says, "Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, 'Why have you done this?' They knew that he had disobeyed the Lord, and he rightly deserved to be reproached.

Perhaps you are a person who has fallen into this kind of sinful attitude. You desire judgment more than mercy. Perhaps you have forgotten the kind of mercy that you received when you became a Christian. You were the enemy of God, but He befriended you. You were alienated from the life of God and He drew near to your soul to save it. You were hostile to God and opposed to doing His will, and He reconciled you to Himself by the death of His Son. But now there is someone who has greatly offended you, so much so, that you do not feel that it right that they should be shown mercy, either by yourself or God. You think that their sins are that great. But God calls you to show them mercy. Remember that "mercy triumphs over judgment," it says in James 2: 13. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy." Mercy triumphed over judgment in God's mind when He saved you from your sins. Christ pronounces a blessing upon the merciful in Matthew 5: 7, saying, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

4th – The Psalmist hopes and prays that he will be able to delight himself in God's commandments and praise God for them. (verses 47 and 48)

"And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love." "My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes." Why do we love the commandments of God? It is because God has given them to us, to keep them and do them. Yes that's is true. He has given them to us so that we might honor Him in the keeping and the doing of them. But every believer knows, or they should know, that they cannot keep the least of God's commandments without Christ's grace working in their heart. Grace is not only God's favor, it is His enablement. A Christian cannot keep God's commandments to His glory without this. It is Christ who has obeyed God's Law fully on our behalf. He is our High Priest who has offered up the acceptable sacrifice. Listen to Hebrews 7, verse 19 and following. "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, but Christ with 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 Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant." A surety is the one who pays your debt in full when you are not able to do so. This is what Christ has done with our sin-debt. My brethren, it is a New Covenant that we celebrate this day. Listen to what is done for us when we are under this New Covenant. Hebrews 8: 10 says, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." This is what we celebrate now as we come to partake of these elements. Let us pray to live to God's glory, keeping His commandments by the grace which Christ has purchased for us, and which He applies to our hearts.

