

Psalm 119:41-48
Communicating God's Word
I will speak of thy testimonies... v. 46

As each section in the Psalm sets forth an emphasis of its own, I detect in this section of the Psalm an emphasis on communicating God's word. In v. 42 reference is made to answering those that heap reproach on God's people. Look at what it says beginning in v. 41 – *Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.* Here is the first mention of communication – answering those that reproach me.

Verse 43 on the surface of it seems like a strange expression and it, too, makes reference to communicating God's word – *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.* One commentator gives this explanation of this statement: *It is well known that men do, when persecution threatens, either altogether deny the truth, or weakly and lukewarmly confess it; but lest this should happen to him, David therefore prays here, O Lord, take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, i.e., make me, with an intrepid spirit, always to confess the avowed truth boldly and manfully.* We have in this verse, then, a petition for boldness to confess the word of truth.

The third reference to communicating God's word is found in v. 46 *I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.* And so we have in these three verses instances of: Answering the reproacher, praying for boldness to confess the truth, and speaking the truth even before kings – you begin to see the emphasis in this section on communicating God's word. This is a matter that is ever on the heart of the true Christian. He desires to speak the truth of God.

In Acts 4 when Peter and John were brought before the Jewish Council and told they should no longer speak of Christ their reply was *we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard* – v. 20. Telling a Christian he cannot speak of Christ is like telling a man he can no longer eat food or drink water or breath air. We cannot but speak the things that we know of Christ and his glorious salvation.

In Mark's gospel we have the account in chp. 1 of Christ healing a man of his leprosy. Christ had a request that he made known to this man. So we read in v. 44 *See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.* It would seem that Christ was requesting the impossible for in the very next verse we go on to read: *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

Back in Acts chp. 8 we read of the widespread persecution that was conducted by Saul before he became Paul. Men were arrested and imprisoned and the people were scattered

and yet we read in v. 4 *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*

I was struck by the 71st Psalm which contains a prayer of an aged man by the testimony of the elder Psalmist in v. 17 *O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.* From the days of his youth the Psalmist says he has declared God's word. And then notice what his burden is in the days of his old age which is given us in the next verse – *Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.* His burden is the same. He wants to show or demonstrate or declare God's power to the generation that was to succeed him.

Such is the desire of every true Christian. The gospel means literally *good news* and when the news is as good as salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ then that news must be shared. I know I've shared with you that following my conversion to Christ, I was naïve enough to think that everyone would want to hear what I had discovered. It was a crude awakening to realize that hardly anybody was interested in the gospel that I had discovered to the saving of my soul.

And over time as iniquity abounds and the love of many grows cold it becomes too easy for the Christian to abstain from communicating the truth of God's word. Many Christians more or less come to accept the notion that there are few if any that are interested in the gospel. And as life becomes a pattern of mundane activities communicating the word of God can become rare if it's ever done at all. This is a condition, therefore, that must not be accepted but instead must be overcome. And so that's what I want to call your attention to this morning – this theme of communicating God's word. The question I want to raise and endeavor to answer is simply this:

What Does the Christian Need in Order to Communicate God's Word?

When you've lost the vision and burden and scarcely give a thought to communicating God's word, what does the Christian need? And especially what does he need in order to communicate God's word again? Consider with me first of all:

I. What the Christian Needs to Receive

Verses 41 & 42 present to us a condition/result kind of structure. It begins with the Psalmist's petition *Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.* The Psalmist is aware when he makes this petition that if God answers his prayer then it will lead to a certain result. That result is given in the next verse: *So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.* You'll notice that the fear of reproach will not hinder the Psalmist from answering the one heaps reproach on him. He'll be equipped to answer him.

Here, then, is a key lesson to learn in the school of evangelism. The "how to" of evangelism, if you will. What is needed is not so much an academic study in evangelism

so much as a fresh apprehension of the greatness of God's mercies in salvation. The word *mercies* you'll notice is plural. Spurgeon gives a good description of the plural use of this word when he writes:

What a mass of mercies are heaped together in the one salvation of our Lord Jesus! It includes the mercies which spare us before our conversion, and lead up to it. Then comes calling mercy, regenerating mercy, converting mercy, justifying mercy, pardoning mercy. Nor can we exclude from complete salvation any of those many mercies which are needed to conduct the believer safe to glory. Salvation is an aggregate of mercies incalculable in number, priceless in value, incessant in application, eternal in endurance. To the God of our mercies be glory, world without end.

The actual term *mercies* is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is sometimes translated by the word *lovingkindness* and it is described at times as meaning God's covenant love and loyalty to his people. Let these mercies come to me – that's what the Psalmist prays and this is exactly what you and I need. *Let thy mercies come also to me, O LORD, even thy salvation.* This is the first mention of salvation in the psalm and you see at once how salvation is connected to the LORD's mercies.

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, Jeremiah writes in Lam. 3:21,22 *because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.* New mercies every morning – that's what we need. Mercies that come to us the way manna came to the children of Israel. Mercies that come to us as a part of our daily bread. This is what brings to us, you see, renewed spiritual vitality. This is what sets us apart from others that are only outwardly religious.

We draw from God's mercies and need those mercies to be ministered to our souls on a daily basis. I should point out here that in order for God to answer such a petition he first had to send his Son to die for our sins. Mercy, you see, is grounded in righteousness. As the Psalmist says in Ps 85:10 *Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed [each other].* Christ's atoning death, was, of course, and is the greatest act of God's mercy. Here is that act of mercy that meets the helpless and hopeless condition of a lost sinner.

But mercy doesn't end with the Christian's initial conversion. Multiplied mercies must be his portion. He needs the mercies of God to be ministered to him constantly. The renewal of these mercies is ever fresh and ever reviving. While previous mercies are cause for thanksgiving, it's nevertheless true that you cannot live on yesterday's mercies, any more than the Israelites could live on day-old manna. You need those new mercies to be ministered to your soul.

Where does communicating the word of God, begin, then? It begins with the Christian seeking after Christ for fresh supplies of mercy to be ministered to his soul by the Spirit of God. And when this happens – the Christian will never be at a loss to give answer to those that may reproach him. We're told in 1Pet. 3:15 that we are to *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason*

of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. This presents what I think is the ideal method of evangelism. Souls are coming to you. They're coming to you because they see something different in you. They can tell that you're not simply religious. All sorts of people are religious but there's a vitality about you that puts a glow to your demeanor. That vitality is due to regular and fresh supplies of bountiful mercies being communicated to your soul. Be ready, Peter says, to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. They will come to you. They will call on you for that answer. Be ready to give glory and honor to Christ.

That's the ideal form of evangelism but let's face it – it doesn't happen all that often and the Psalmist is not dealing with an ideal condition, he's dealing, rather, with a difficult condition. He's dealing with a situation where the mockers and scoffers of the truth are heaping reproach on the Christian. Even in that unpleasant condition the Christian must be ready to answer. And if God's mercies are flooding his soul and filling his heart then he'll be undaunted by the reproaches of the world. He'll be too far above the world to be pulled down to the world's level and he'll be ready, therefore, to deal even with those that heap reproach on him.

So we have the first essential for communicating the word of truth. If you're going to do it and do it effectively then you must receive the mercies of the LORD. Salvation must be freshly ministered to your soul. When that happens speaking the truth will come quite naturally and quite spontaneously. You'll be so near to Christ that you'll be unashamed to own him and confess him and the world will see in you a consistency between your demeanor and your actions and your words.

This is the positive side to the equation, so to speak. Our next point to consider takes us to the negative side of the equation. For not only do we see in this section of the Psalm what the Christian needs to receive but we see next:

II. What the Christian Must Dread

Verse 43 shows us what we must dread. Notice what it says – *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.*

To have God's word removed from our mouths is to tantamount to saying that we're so unaffected by that word that we lose any ability to communicate it. There's a cross reference to this verse that speaks of the wicked. In Ps 50:16 we read: *But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or [that] thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?*

When we lose our spiritual sensitivity we share something in common with wicked sinners. They have no spiritual sensitivity either. They're dead in trespasses and sins. And in such a condition when they may endeavor to speak a word for the Lord their hypocrisy is so manifested that it becomes one great distraction to the word of God. And hence this question from God *What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?* Who are you to speak for me? That's what God is asking.

This is a spiritual condition, then, to be dreaded and we should dread it to the point that it drives us to our knees where we beg God to deliver us from it. Oh Lord, take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth. Charles Bridges in his commentary on this verse has some very challenging and heart searching observations to make.

Sometimes we are afraid to speak for the Saviour, lest we should incur the charge of hypocrisy. At other times we are ashamed to speak, from the absence of that only constraining principle — "the love of Christ." And thus "the word of truth is taken out of our mouths." Often have we wanted a word to speak for the relief of the Lord's tempted people, and have not been able to find it; so that the recollection of precious lost opportunities may well give utterance to the prayer — "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." Not only do not take it out of my heart; but let it be ready in my mouth for a confession of my Master.

Charles Bridges wrote this commentary in about 1827. But in the remark that follows you would think he was a contemporary to 21st century Christianity. Listen to the rest of this quote and let it search your hearts: *Some of us know the painful trial of the indulgence of worldly habits and conversation, when a want of liberty of spirit has hindered us from standing up boldly for our God. We may perhaps allege the plea of bashfulness or judicious caution in excuse for silence; which however, in many instances, we must regard as a self deceptive covering for the real cause of restraint — the want of apprehension of the mercy of God to the soul.*

I love this last statement because it ties this verse into v. 41 – the petition for fresh apprehensions of God's mercies. Some people, you know, would look at such a searching statement as this and respond to it the wrong way. They would reason to themselves that the next time the situation calls for a Christian to speak I will muster all the courage I can and I won't accept any excuses for myself and I will boldly confess Christ. To reason that way is to miss the point. It's to fail to realize that the word of truth has been removed out of your mouth so that the only way to speak that word is to have to force yourself to speak to it. It's better to be silent than to try to force the word out of your mouth for if the word has been removed from your mouth there wouldn't be adequate consistency between your life and that word to have any impact on the one to whom you're trying to communicate.

Better, by far, to face the situation squarely and be honest enough to acknowledge before God that you need fresh apprehension of his mercies to your soul. You need the power of salvation to reach your heart again with reviving and refreshing power. You need a lost spiritual vitality to be restored so that speaking for God isn't something that's forced it's something instead that springs from a heart that is filled to overflowing with the reality of God's mercies.

We have a vivid illustration in the book of Genesis of a man who arguably had the word of God taken out of his mouth. Abraham's nephew, Lot, was so given to worldliness that he could live comfortably in the city of Sodom. And then the time came that the angels of the Lord visited Sodom and visited Lot and his family. You remember the narrative? –

they told Lot that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were about to be destroyed in judgment and they instructed Lot to convey to his family that they must get out of Sodom immediately. And you remember how well Lot's warning went over with his family – especially his sons in law? Ge 19:14 *And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.*

Here is a man that has had the word of truth taken from his mouth. He may try to speak it but his speaking is perceived as a mockery. What a dreadful condition is this, then, having the word of truth taken out of our mouths. Our dread of such a condition, as I say, should drive us to our knees to beg God that we would not have his word removed from our mouths. Oh that we may, instead, know the freshness of his mercies renewed to our souls day by day. So long as those mercies are renewed to our souls then his word will not be removed from our mouths.

So we see what the Christian must receive in order to communicate God's truth – he must receive God's mercies anew and afresh. On the other side of the coin we see what the Christian must dread – the thing that will keep him from communicating the word of truth is when that word is removed from his mouth. There is one more consideration I'll call your attention to and that is:

III. How the Christian Must Walk

If we are going to communicate God's truth then there is something that must govern our walk. Let me convey to you the force of the Psalmist's argument by reading again from v. 43 thru 45. *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.* And then there follows another result statement in v. 44. The Psalmist is saying in effect, Lord, if you will answer my prayer and not remove your word from my mouth here will be the result – v. 44 *So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.*

But then v. 46 conveys to us yet another result of this petition being answered and this result now relates to my theme of communicating God's truth. Look at what it says in v. 46 and keep in mind the flow of the argument – *I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.*

You see the connection between walking at liberty and speaking God's testimonies even before kings? The picture that is conveyed to us in these verses is the picture of a Christian who has been set free from the fear of man. Kings, you know, were very important people. They were deemed in some ancient countries to be as gods. You better be careful how you talk to a king. The last thing you want to do is provoke the anger of a man who has the power to imprison you or execute you.

In the Psalmist's case, however, that king's authority doesn't matter so much because the Psalmist knows that the king is subordinate to a greater king – one who rules all nations. Whenever I think of a man speaking before a king my mind is drawn to the Apostle Paul in

the book of Acts speaking before two kings – Festus and Agrippa. I love the way Luke sets that scene. He writes in Acts 25:23 *And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.*

And then Paul is brought forth. What a contrast between Paul to these pompous rulers and chief captains and principle men. Paul is a prisoner and he's in chains. And then he proceeds in the next chapter of Acts to speak and he tells of Christ how Christ was the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers (26:6). And he speaks of the resurrection of Christ and he speaks of his conversion to Christ and then he speaks of his commission from Christ *To open the eyes of the Gentiles, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ* (26:18).

And so powerful and searching and convicting is this word from Paul that Festus interrupts him and blurts out in v. 24 *Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.* And rather than being intimidated by Festus Paul presses the matter on King Agrippa - *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

The reason I love this scene and Luke's vivid depiction of this scene is because it so graphically shows that Paul was the one who was at liberty while Festus and Agrippa and who knows how many others were the ones that were in spiritual bondage. Paul, you see, knew that he was accepted by God in Christ. Paul knew that his sins were forgiven. Paul knew that everlasting life was his portion. Paul knew that Christ had met his every obligation to the law, thus setting him free – free from sin's dominion and free from sin's condemnation and as a result of his knowledge of Christ's love he was also set free from the fear of man.

John writes in his first epistle 4:18 *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* And so once again the whole matter comes back to the opening words of this section of the Psalm in v. 41 *Let thy mercies (lovingkindnesses) come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.*

Overcoming the fear of man is not a matter of trying to psyche yourself up to the level of courage you need in order to speak for Christ – it's a matter of basking in Christ's lovingkindness until the fear of man simply vanishes from you and sets you free. And when you walk at liberty, basking, as you will in Christ's love then you'll speak – you'll speak God's testimonies. You'll give answer to those who reproach you. Indeed you'll speak readily and unashamedly before kings or before rulers- before politicians or whatever other VIPs come your way. Let's close in prayer.