

Zayin
Psalm 119:49-56
ABC 7/17/18

Athanasius (196-373 AD) was a staunch defender of the full deity of the Son of God against the Arians who said Jesus was a created being. The story goes that when the tide appeared to be moving in favor of the Arians a concerned colleague said to him, *Athanasius, the whole world is against you*. His quick & firm response was, *Athanasius Contra Mundum!* meaning, *Athanasius against the world*.¹ Vss 49-56 are the Zayin (*zah-yeen*) segment of Ps 119. In this portion the psalmist appears to feel very much like Athanasius: *the whole world is against me*. The arrogant mock him (51) & the wicked who ignore God's law (53) seem to be everywhere. Yet one thing remains certain no matter what: God is faithful & God will comfort him in his times of trouble (50, 52). When everyone seems to be against you, vss 49-56 of Ps 119 provide both encouragement & guidance for how we should think & respond. In the Christian life we're called upon to be comforted even in our affliction & to rejoice even in our sorrows. How do we do that? Paul called upon the Corinthians & you & me to learn how to sorrow with rejoicing. & he called upon the Thessalonians & us to grieve, but not without hope. How do you do that? This part of Ps 119 addresses that question, a vital question for the Christian life.

If you look quickly at vss 49, 52, & 55 you'll see the word **remember** is in each & in the Hebrew it begins each of the lines it's in. By my saying that, you automatically know **remember** begins with the letter *zah-yeen*, right? These are the only 3 occurrences of this word in Ps 119 so you know the psalmist included all 3 together for a reason & we'll be using them as our outline this morning. It's 1st used as an appeal to God to **remember** His own words of promise, which the psalmist is sure He'll do & which is his source of comfort. In the following 2 uses of **remember** the author asserts that he won't forget but will remember God's **ordinances from of old** (52) & God's **name** (55). In other words, he'll use his times of suffering & being mocked to meditate on God's Word & character, knowing that a purpose of his suffering must be to give him time to get to know His God better. Stand with me as we read God's Word given to us this morning: **49-56 PRAY**

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th edition

1. Request – Remember (49-51) When life is difficult it's wise to pray & cling to God. That we don't do so more quickly & more often is simply an indication of our depravity & the fact that sin makes us stupid. A hurting child can always run to a loving Father, & that's exactly what the psalmist does. There's only one specific prayer in this stanza & it's in **vs 49**.

All the other vss of this stanza are statements by the writer that he trusts what God has written in His law & that he will continue to love it & obey its teachings. But he's also acknowledging that suffering is common to us all. One commentator says, *What is important is not escaping the suffering, even with God's help, but continuing to trust God & prove Him a genuine source of comfort even while we are going through the trial.*² He's right. While we don't go out & look for afflictions & while we're anxious to get through them, we must trust God & look to Him & His Word for comfort. Interestingly, the psalmist doesn't ask for deliverance. He simply asks for God to keep His word. When applied to God, the word **remember** means to pay attention to or to work on behalf of. Being omniscient, God can't forget anything, but He can decide not to **remember** it against us (Is 43:25; Jer 31:34; Heb 8:12; 10:17).

A. Word to Servant Vs 49 is a prayer for God to **remember** His word to His **servant** (17, 23, 38). It's a prayer for God to be mindful of His word & to keep or fulfill the promises He has made to His people. As another commentator points out, *The psalmist may be praying for a specific application of the divine promises to protect & bless...*³ Humanly speaking, this was a plea for God to fulfill the promises given in His word. The psalmist makes his appeal fully aware of the Master-servant relationship he enjoys with God (52, 55). It's this relationship that gives him a waiting attitude & a positive hopefulness. He will not doubt. He has hope.

B. Result: The psalmist prayed that God would use His Word to work on his behalf. He had hope because of the promises God had given to him & he prayed that those promises would be fulfilled.

1) Hope Do you see the 2 sides here? **Remember the word to Your servant** – God speaks a word to His servant. Then, **in which You have made me hope**, which is the other side: The servant has

² Boice, J. M., *Psalms 107–150: An Expositional Commentary*, p 1000

³ Alan Ross, *Commentary on the Psalms: 90-150*, pp 509-10

hoped in God's Word. God has given us promises on which we may hope & He's given us a hope in His promises. This is vital for living the Christian life. As you know, God gives us promises but sometimes we have a hard time believing them. The psalmist says, *Lord, You've done both sides. You've given me wonderful promises, but You haven't just given me those promises. You've allowed me to believe those promises & to have hope in them.* How can we sorrow with rejoicing & grieve with hope & be comforted in our affliction? Because God has made promises to us & by His Spirit He's enabled us to have hope in those promises. Is this your experience? If it's not, which side do you need to take to the Lord? *Father, open my eyes to Your promises. I know they're there, but I haven't taken the time to find & meditate on them. Or, Lord, I know they're there but where I am right now I'm having a hard time hoping in them.* Or maybe it's both. If so, take that prayer to the Lord. 3,000 years ago, the author saw the Lord's promises in the Word & God had given him hope in those promises & it had enabled him to live the life of a believer. God will do the same for you in a much greater way. Though OT believers rightly had hope in God's mercy (Job 13:15; Ps 31:24; 33:18, 22; 38:15; 39:7; 42:5, 11; 43:5; 62:5; 71:5, 14; 119:49, 166; 130:5, 7; 131:3; 146:5; Jer 29:11; 31:17; Lam 3:24), that hope wasn't based on the old covenant. The old covenant, with its endless sacrifices, provided no hope of forgiveness for sin (Heb 10:4). In contrast, hope came in the new covenant, which provides forgiveness of sin & complete redemption, because Jesus, the writer of Hebrews tells us, **through His own blood ... obtained eternal redemption (9:12). Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (7:25).** The hope of the OT saints was based on the new covenant (Heb 11:24–26; 1 Pt 1:10–12). Don't misunderstand biblical *hope*. Hope is the confident belief that God will fulfill all His promises. Many have already been fulfilled, but not all of them. The new covenant was ratified at the Cross, though its benefits have always been appropriated by faith, but the fullness of its hope won't be experienced until our future glorification. It's then that we'll receive our glorified bodies & be freed not only from sin's penalty, but also from its presence (Rom 8:16–17, 23–25, 29–30; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20–21; 2 Pt 1:4; 1 Jn 3:2). Paul expressed this hope in his benediction for the Romans: **Now may the God of**

hope fill you with all joy & peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (15:13). He prayed for the Ephesians that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened, so that they would know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (1:18). Later he reminded them, There is one body & one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling (Eph 4:4). He described to the Colossians the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel (1:5; cf 23, 27). He urged the Thessalonians to put on ... as a helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thes 5:8). The writer of Hebrews declared that God,

...desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure & steadfast & one which enters within the veil (6:17–19).

He also wrote of a better hope, through which we draw near to God (7:19). Peter wrote, Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pt 1:3). He then told his readers, Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.... Your faith & hope are in God (13, 21). Certain, well established, & irrevocable is the hope provided by God in Christ. We can boldly base our lives on it & be comforted in affliction. Isn't that what the psalmist says?

2) Comfort 50

This Hebrew word for **comfort** is only used here & in Job 6:10. Its meaning includes encouragement & not just consolation. In the midst of personal affliction, which included scorn & taunting by his enemies (22, 39, 42, 51), he found comfort in the life-giving Word of God. Those who trust in Christ have the sure & certain promises of God's Word at their fingertips. However, when we don't see those promises immediately fulfilled there can be some doubt & disappointment. Will God come through? Will He keep His promises? God's Word answers with a resounding *yes!* God never crosses His fingers while making a promise. His promises are a source of hope, of confident assurance, & of comfort. They are a source of comfort, consolation,

& relief. The psalmist finds sustaining power in God's promises. There are troubles, but God will see us through them. Spurgeon is right when he says, *Comfort is desirable all times; but comfort in affliction is like a lamp in a dark place.*⁴ Another result is...

3) Revival 50b

There's power in the promises of God. One promise with power is that God will revive our souls with strength, courage, & resolve when we're afflicted & going through trials. Affliction is the boot camp, the training field to make us stronger. There's a wonderful NT complement to this vs in 2 Cor 12:9 where our Lord says to Paul, **My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.** Suffering isn't fun. It is, however, the place where we discover our God is sufficient, that He is enough. Let this be our continual prayer: **revive me according to Your word (25). Revive me in Your ways (37). Revive me through Your righteousness (40).** Then we can proclaim, **Your word has revived me (50)!** When our hope is in God & His promises, when we've been comforted in our affliction, when He has revived us by His Word, we can still expect ...

4) Derision The psalmist says in vs 51, **the arrogant, the insolent (ESV), the proud (NLT) utterly deride me.** The Message says **they ridicule me without mercy.** To **utterly deride** is to treat with scorn, contempt, & even physical abuse. Unbelievers who mock God, mock God's servant. They make fun of him for loving & obeying a God no one can see & therefore, in their opinion, isn't there. Nevertheless, because God has been faithful to keep His word in the past, the psalmist won't turn away from obeying God's Word (51). When he calls to mind the ancient words that have stood the test of time (52), he'll find comfort in them & the God who gave them. Scoffers won't drive him from his God. Instead, they'll drive him to his God. It must be the same for us. God & His Word are eternal, true, & reliable. We can & must take comfort in that! True faith not only believes the promises of God but also prays for God to work. In his believing & praying the writer found encouragement & he didn't abandon his faith or run from his problems. He was revived with new life! The psalmist is saying to us that we should expect to be jeered for our

⁴ *Treasury of David*, www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-50.html

religion but that we should not be jeered out of our religion. The 5th result we see is in the 2nd half of vs **51b**.

5) Don't Turn from Your Word. From a merely human perspective, his response here to their actions is inexplicable. In the pressure cooker of persecution, he maintained that he hadn't detoured from God's path for life. His loyalty to the Word & his hope in God's promise, doesn't mean he isn't ridiculed. He is. But he's determined not to be turned away from God's Word. We talked a little bit about this last Sunday & it's important for us to understand in our own day & time. The things we believe that used to seem normal & reasonable to our culture increasingly seem abnormal & unreasonable, fanatical, mean, narrow, & backwards. The culture we live in, more & more, finds the things Christians believe & the Bible teaches to be worthy of derision. If we're going to hold fast to the Word, we must, with the psalmist, expect derision. & our response needs to be like the psalmist's response. The psalmist digs in & says, *You may mock me but I'm not letting loose of God's Word. I believe God's Word. I'm going to hold on to God's Word. I'm going to turn to God's Word. I'm going to continue in God's Word. I'm not going to let it go.* Matthew Henry says of this passage, *Those can bear but little for Christ that cannot bear a hard word for Him.*⁵ In other words, if you're not willing to be mocked for Jesus then there's not much you're ready to bear for Jesus. & the psalmist is reminding us to be prepared for that. That's important for us in this culture, especially you young people. You will, on numerous occasions in your life, have the opportunity to either be made fun of for your Savior or to avoid that by denying your Savior. & the psalmist is saying, *I will not deny God's Word. I'll happily accept the derision but I'm holding onto the Word of God.* He's made his request for God to remember. Now, what does the psalmist remember?

2. Remember 52a As you know, the Holy Spirit is our Helper & Guide to remember God's **ordinances**. He's able to bring to our minds the truths from His Word, but only if we have something in our minds He can help us recall! How could the psalmist know the ancient words that God had given previously? Because God had preserved His Word & it had been taught to

⁵ *Commentary on the Whole Bible: Volume IV, p 278*

each new generation. Isn't that still our obligation & joy today (2 Tim 2:2)? Unless the Word of God is honored, taught, & obeyed in a church, that church is just a generation away from extinction. Back to the psalm. What does the psalmist remember?

A. Ordinances 52a These **ordinances** seem to be the workings of God in the past, whereby the righteous have been delivered. This kind of remembrance brings relief, support, & encouragement. He had asked the Lord to **remember** His Word to His servant & here he, the servant, remembers God & His **ordinances**, His judgments. When we see no present display of God at work, it's always wise to fall back upon the record of God's work in past times. The Lord is always the same, never changing. Therefore, our comfort must be found in what our God has promised, has done, what He will do, & the promises He will keep. When a child of God is unjustly treated, he'll find comfort in the fact that there's a Judge who will avenge His own & make all things right in His time. What does this result in?

B. Results The 1st is again,

1) Comfort 52 There is comfort in remembering God's **ordinances from of old**. We are comforted & strengthened in hope as we remember how God has dealt with people & circumstances in the past. The 2nd result is ...

2) Indignation 53

Literally, *raging heat grasps me*. The word for **burning indignation** is used of whirlwind (Ps 11:6) & also of a famine-induced hunger (Lam 5:10) in Scripture. In Hebrew it's *zalaphah*, which was a burning wind from the desert. The Arabs called it a poison wind: hot, dry, & merciless.⁶ It's an unusual word that here describes the psalmist's great agitation with the wicked who have abandoned God's Word. The **arrogant** deride the Word of God (51) & the psalmist says, *I won't turn away from the law* (51). Then he says, *I'm going to meditate on Your law & I see it's wisdom* (52). Now he says, *It makes me angry when I see the wicked publicly & openly forsake Your law* (53). We must be careful with this though. It's tempting to be angry about others' sin & go easy on our own. That's not how we should be. We should be hard on our own sins & be patient with

⁶ Gene Cunninghams, *Psalm 119: The Diary of a Captive*, p 57

the sins of others. But that's not the circumstances the psalmist is addressing. He's talking about an open, flagrant, brazen rejection of God's law. & it burns in his heart. **Indignation** is his response because his heart is aligned with His God. He hates the things God hates because he believes God's Word. Those who love God's Word share God's outrage against sin. Such disregard for the infallible & inerrant Word of God seizes the psalmist with righteous indignation. The Message says, **I'm beside myself with anger**. The NLT says, **I became furious with the wicked**. To have such a treasure, such riches, such sweet honey, & then ignore & deride it is simply stupid. It's evil & wicked. Jesus said it's by the Word of God that a person truly lives (Mt 4:4). To walk away from God's Word is to choose the way of death. The psalmist is horrified by such behavior. After all, the wicked haven't ultimately offended him. The One they've offended is God Himself. Although these men were the psalmist's tormenters, the primary reason he gives for his revulsion of them is because they **forsake God's law**. Those who deny God's word & forsake it often lead others to do the same. Jesus graphically described the penalty for those who lead others astray when He said, **It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck & he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble** (Lk 17:1-2). God's people are provoked when they see flagrant violations of His law, because our heart is with Him & when you love God & His Word, you also share His indignation against sin.

Between vss 53 & 54 the pendulum swings from the treachery of the godless to the tranquility of the godly. The Psalmist remembers God's ordinances & this results in comfort, indignation, & ...

3) Singing 54

These weren't dirges or the blues but *songs of rejoicing*.⁷ As a child of God, the author had at his disposal the Divine resources which allow him to praise even from the pits of persecution & peril. Those who love the Lord & His Word make Him & them the theme of their pilgrim songs. We are strangers in a strange land. We are aliens in a place that isn't our home. We're on a journey, on a pilgrimage home. & we sing as we travel. Christianity is a singing religion. Throw us in jail & we'll

⁷ *Theological Dictionary of the OT*, 4:94, cf p 98

sing (Acts 16:25), right? Paul & Silas sang in prison at Philippi, after having been severely beaten. They were doing it in the middle of the night, which is another thing the psalmist mentions (55). The story in Acts says, **About midnight Paul & Silas were praying & singing hymns to God, & the other prisoners were listening to them** (Acts 16:25). After witnessing such faith it's no wonder the Philippian jailer, & many others, believed on the Jesus Paul & Silas proclaimed. When others are turning away from God's Word, the psalmist is singing God's Word because he has something to sing about. Even as a pilgrim, not yet home & afflicted, he could sing praises to his God. It's always been natural for Christians to sing of what is lodged in their hearts. The singing of Christians doesn't make the causes of their sorrows go away, though God sometimes does that, but it lifts our spirits & testifies to the goodness of God, who provides comfort even in bad times. Wherever & whenever Christians gather, we encourage one another **singing psalms & hymns & spiritual songs with thanksgiving in our hearts to God** (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19). God's Word is a source of joy & singing for believers. God's Word is the content of our song & the inspiration for our song. Wherever we live & wherever we go we'll sing to our Savior for who He is & all He's done. As a sojourner on this earth (19), we're just passing through. This world is not our home, but while we're here we must praise our Lord. Singing provides sustaining strength to press on.

3. Remember (55-56) The psalmist asks God to remember in vs 49. He remembers God's ordinances in vs 52. & now he remembers God's name. **55**

This could mean, *I will remember & meditate on Your name when I lie in my bed & can't sleep.* However, it could also have a 2nd meaning. **In the night** could have the connotation of darkness or dark times of life. Maybe the psalmist uses the concept of night like John does in his gospel. When Judas left the last supper to betray our Lord, John says, **& it was night** (13:30). Yes, it was night literally, but it was also night theologically as the powers of darkness came against the Lord Jesus. On that night our Lord was obedient to fulfill the Scriptures that predicted His death. He kept the Father's law. Meditation on God & His Word in our darkest hour is sure to strengthen & sustain us. After all the Word of God will guide us to His name & His name will take us to the Lord Himself. Specifically, the psalmist remembers...

A. God's Name 55a

The Jews so revered the name of God that they wouldn't even speak it. While reading Scripture, when the Jews came to the sacred name of God, they would simply sigh or say instead, *Adonai, my Lord*. The scribes who copied the Scriptures always used a pen newly dipped in ink to write the name of God & were instructed that should a king address them while writing that name, they were to take no notice of him.⁸ To the ancient Hebrews, a person's name was a window into his character. To know someone's name was to know who he was & what he was like. So what is God's name? In Ex 3 we have this conversation between Moses & God,

Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, & I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; & He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, & the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, & this is My memorial-name to all generations (13-15).

There is so much there in the name, **I am**. Wiersbe has paraphrased it as, *I am present, I am actively present, & I can do what I choose when I choose to do it.*⁹ God's name, *Yahweh* speaks not only of His existence & eternity, but also of His sovereignty, power, & the working of His will in this world. When this poet says he'll remember God's name in the night, he's saying that in darkness, in adversity & trial & suffering, he'll meditate on the character of God as revealed in the Word. & in that meditation, he'll keep the Word. To remember God's name is to ask Him to remember us & work on our behalf. To remember God in the night makes for an obedient life with God in the light. There's a connection between a deep reflection on God's existence, character, & attributes & a rekindled commitment to the precepts of God's own revelation of Himself. To remember God's name is to know Him personally. God's name is the representation of His character. It's the reputation of His attributes. The name of God speaks to who God is. & when he says, **I remember Your name**, he's saying, *Lord, I know what You're like. I know who You are & I know You personally because I have Your Word. You've revealed Yourself to me in Your*

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⁹ *Be Exultant*, Logos software

Word & I remember Your name in the night. To remember God's name is to know Him personally & to know Him is to want to do His Word. Listen again, **55.**

To know God is to want to do His Word.

B. Results All kinds of translations & interpretations have been given for vs 56. Suffice to say it provides a bridge between the truth of vs 55b (**keep Your Law**) & the truth's restatement in 56b (**I observe Your precepts**). In other words, he testifies that his obedience, even under oppression, is God's providence for his life. Armed with the conviction that God is sovereign over all the circumstances of his life, he could face the uncertainty of the future with a greater degree of confidence.

1) Keep Your Law (55b) Here's the brilliant thing that the psalmist makes so clear in vs 56: It isn't a burden to obey God's Word, it's a blessing. It actually lifts burdens to live by God's Word. It brings blessings to live according to God's teachings. God has given us His Word to teach us how to live & to show us a need for a Savior. & those things are blessings!

2) Becomes Mine 56

This is a glorious, triumphant statement from the Psalmist. The power & goodness & comfort & strength of God's word weren't only ideas or theories to him. By faith, faith that's come by God's word (Rom 10:17), he can rightly say, **This has become mine!** Not, *this might be mine someday.* Nor, *this was once mine.* But **this has become mine!** *I know it. I believe it. I love it. I internalize it. I apply it. I live it. I breathe it. It is my hope & comfort.* His comfort in adversity, his remembrance of God & His name, the desire to sing, the courage to face the enemy, this hope in God's promise, is all because he observed the precepts of God, made them his own, & walked according to them. How can we be like the psalmist? By doing what he did.

3) Observe Your Precepts Derek Kidner is right, *although obedience does not earn God's blessings, it turns us round to receive them.*¹⁰ Our stanza closes with words that are the sum of the matter. The psalmist has kept the Lord's precepts. He's obeyed the Word of God. The ESV says this happened because **this blessing has fallen to me**, perhaps a reference to obeying the

¹⁰ *Psalms 73-150*, p 425

word (56b) or even to the ability to sing when times are tough (54). The reward of obedience is more obedience. The blessing of faithful service is more faithful service. Spurgeon puts it beautifully:

*He had this comfort, this remembrance of God, this power to sing, this courage to face the enemy, this hope in the promise, because he had earnestly observed the commands of God, & striven to walk in them. We are not rewarded for our works, but there is a reward in them. Many a comfort is obtainable only by careful living: we can surely say of such consolations, "This I had because I kept thy precepts."*¹¹

He's just said, *I remember Your name, Your character in the difficult times.* Now he's saying, *I've taken Your Word to myself because my eyes have been opened to Your truth.* Stripped of all means of protecting himself, he realizes that in the Word of God he carries the greatest weapon in the universe. He has made the decision to take up the sword of the Spirit. We must do no less. Want hope in a dark world? Want comfort in adversity? Remember God & His Word.

Athanasius is a hero from early church history. William Wilberforce (1759-1833), who helped abolish slavery in England, is a hero from a more recent time. He faced great opposition & many defeats in his battle against the evils of the slave industry. Several times he became so discouraged he thought of quitting. On Feb 24, 1791 he received a letter from John Wesley that would move him to stay in the fight. Its words echo Psalm 119:49-56 & draw from the example of the great Athanasius. A portion reads:

*Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius **contra mundum** (against the world), I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, & of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men & devils; but, if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well-doing! Go on in the name of God, & in the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it. That He who has guided you from your youth up, may continue to strengthen you in this & all things, is the prayer of ... your affectionate servant, John Wesley.*¹²

God & us against the world? With Him on our side, it's more than enough. May we all remember God's name & ordinances & be able to say with the psalmist: **56**

¹¹www.gospelweb.net/SpurgeonGoldenAlphabet/FS_GoldenAlphabet.htm

¹² *The Methodist Quarterly Review, Volume XL—Fourth Series, Volume X, 1858, p 188*