

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Psalm 119 - The importance of God's Word: Zain - Psalm 119:49-56

Welcome to *Truth for Today*. We at *Truth for Today* are going through Psalm 119 in our studies of the Bible. Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm as well as being the longest chapter in the Bible, and perhaps for that reason the 176 verses are seldom or never read completely, either in public or private meditation. The 176 verses are split into twenty-two sections with eight verses per section. In some translations there is printed at the head of each section a Hebrew letter of the alphabet. The meaning of these Hebrew letters often plays a role in being the dominant theme of the section. The section we are considering today is Psalm 119:49-56 and has the heading Zain, hence the title of our talk. Perhaps looking further than Psalm 119:49-56 we are studying today, Psalm 119:49-72 could also be headed up as "our immense spiritual riches." The name of the author of this Psalm is not given but it is most probably David. But, no matter who the writer is, we can hear God's voice speaking in every verse. Let us read the verses before we start the study, Psalm 119:49-56. *"Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law. This I had, because I kept thy precepts."*

The shape of the Hebrew letter Zain resembles a hand-held weapon. Every Christian is given a weapon; the weapon we have is the *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"* (Ephesians 6:17). The Word of God (the Bible) explains how to be equipped for the spiritual battle we face daily as well as assuring us of God's precious promises. Today, more than ever, the Christian needs to be laying hold of the Bible which equips him or her with everything they need for every circumstance they will face in this world.

David, a young man in 1 Samuel 17 under his father's instruction went to see how his brothers were doing in the war with the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 17:17-22). David found out that the whole of Israel was afraid because they were being challenged by a mighty warrior, a giant called Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17:23-25). No-one had the courage or ability to fight him because he was so big and mighty. David was a young lad with no experience of war; what could he do? Not very much according to his brothers and King Saul. But David stepped up to the battle with experience and confidence, not in himself but in his God (see 1 Samuel 17:37). David had previous experience of God saving him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear as he watched his father's sheep in the hill country (see 1 Samuel 17:1-22). Saul gave David his armour but this was no use to David as he had never proved it (see 1 Samuel 17:38-39). David had proved his God! (see 1 Samuel 17:37) Goliath ridiculed David as he saw him coming toward him (see 1 Samuel 17:42). But David went forward with confidence "running" (see 1 Samuel 17:48) to meet Goliath *"in the name of the LORD of hosts"* (1 Samuel 17:45), which speaks to us of the One who is mighty in battle, and David killed the giant (see 1 Samuel 17:50).

Dear friend, this is an amazing story, a story that has been told to children and adults so many times, but have you ever put yourself in David's shoes? I have no doubt you have faced many issues or foes in your life, maybe not all as blatant as a Goliath. But, how have you approached them? In your own strength or by taking hold of the thousands of promises that God has made to us in His word, then drawing strength and confidence from what God says. David was a man after God's own heart (See Acts 13:23); he loved the Word of God and spent much time meditating on it. I hope that being reminded of this story will encourage you to use the weapon God has given you, the Bible, so by reading it you gain confidence and trust in God.

In Psalm 119:49 the psalmist prays a prayer of love, asking not to be forgotten, conscious of his insignificance and anxious never to be overlooked. The basis of this prayer is reminding God of what He has said and promised. The psalmist asks for no new promises or deliverance from the affliction he mentions in Psalm 119:50. The psalmist claims hope as he meditates on the powerful promises of God. Annie Johnson Flint (1866-1932) wrote a beautiful poem which is apt for this verse:

*“God hath not promised skies ever blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labour, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.*

*God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden many a care.*

*God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep.”*

You can read all the precious promises of God but unless you appropriate them by faith you will never be in the good of them. It is an interesting thought that in prayer, as the psalmist did, we should remind God of His promises to us.

In Psalm 119:50, the psalmist finds the comfort he needs in the Word of God. It is interesting to note that he does not ask for deliverance from his affliction. We are not told of the affliction he has but it is obviously a personal one as he says, *“my affliction.”* The challenge has got to be: what is your comfort in times of personal affliction? In Psalm 119:107 the psalmist goes further when he says to the LORD, *“I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy word.”* Can I suggest that experience teaches us how to pray!

The Apostle Paul had an affliction which he asked God on three occasions to remove but he was told that it would not be removed (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). But Paul found comfort in God as we read in 2 Timothy 1:12: *“For the which cause I also sufferer these things: nevertheless, I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”* The Lord in John 14:18 promised: *“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”* Comfort in affliction is like a lamp in a dark place.

The psalmist goes on to speak of quickening; what does that mean? To quicken means to live, to revive or to bring back to life. We are no different to the psalmist; afflictions and circumstances in life get us down. But if we apply God's word to our circumstances we will look on things with a whole new perspective. On a foggy morning it is impossible for us to clear away the fog so we can see things more clearly, but God has the power to do it. Have you ever experienced taking off in the fog in an aeroplane? It can be quite frightening! As you take off, you see nothing but when you rise above the fog and the clouds, everything is bright and clear; the sun is shining and you can look down on the gloom below. This illustration is a lesson for us that, with God's help, we too can rise above our troubles when we pay attention to God's word where we can see things from God's perspective.

In Psalm 119:51 the psalmist expresses his feelings toward the people who were ungodly, full of pride and who did not believe in God. These people scoffed at him and were arrogant towards him. The psalmist, like most of us, was affected by what people were doing and saying to him; his faith was being shaken. But even in these circumstances he never morally deflected from the law, which is God's moral standard that is made clear for us in the Bible. Men and women can be cruel. Men and women can be hurtful and can attack a Christian in different ways. How do you deflect this? How do you stand fast in these attacks? You again need to turn to your Bible and read how Jesus was hated and rejected by mankind when He lived in this world. So it is not at all surprising that as a follower of Jesus you can expect the same treatment. In Ephesians 6:16 we are encouraged to put on the shield of faith which deflects the darts of the wicked. So, by reading the Bible we get encouragement to stand against the evil attacks for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 119:52 the psalmist casts his mind back to the way that God had come in mighty judgment and power upon the ungodly who discarded His name and did evil against His people Israel. The psalmist may have thought about the time when the Israelites were fleeing from captivity in Egypt (see Exodus 14:1-31). The Egyptians were chasing them and the people were afraid (Exodus 14:10). But God opened the Red Sea to allow His people to cross on dry land (Exodus 14:21-22) and, when they were safely over to the other side, He brought the water back down on all the Egyptians (Exodus 14:23). Or maybe the psalmist was thinking back to the tower of Babel when man wanted to make a name for himself and tried to build a tower that would reach Heaven (Genesis 11:1-9). The LORD came down and made the people speak different languages so they could not understand each other and scattered them all over the

earth. It is clear in the Bible that, when the time is right, God deals with the one who scoffs. Psalm 2:4 tells us that the LORD will laugh at the scoffers. The LORD is taking note of those who are going against Him and against His people. The psalmist found great comfort as he took the scrolls and read of God's dealings with men in judgment. Dear fellow believer, if someone is hurting you in this way, be sure they are hurting your Lord and that He, the judge of all the earth, will do right! (See Genesis 18:25). Dig into your Bible and find encouragement and comfort as the psalmist did.

In Psalm 119:53 the psalmist shows his compassion for those around him. They have no desire for the things of the Lord and some even go as far as to scoff at God and the people of God. Every true believer in Christ should have compassion toward our neighbours, our friends, our family, the people we work with, and those we rub shoulders with daily in our streets. Every person who forsakes God's law and rejects God's offer of salvation through faith in His son Jesus Christ is heading for the final judgment day and eternal damnation. We know this; the Bible makes it very clear! Therefore, like the psalmist, we should have a real zeal to preach the Gospel of the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. *"God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). This would teach us that even those who scoff at us or make things difficult for us, we should feel pity for them. We need to pray for them, have compassion on them and desire to have the opportunity to win them from Christ. Being able to do this takes grace and humility and sometimes swallowing our own pride and feelings. But again our help and example is found in the Bible as we read of our wonderful Saviour who washed the feet of Judas whom the Lord knew was about to betray Him (see John 13:1-30).

In Psalm 119:54 the psalmist speaks of what keeps him singing during his life, even during times of affliction. The songs he sang came from the word of God because he was obedient to it and was cheered by it. What do you sing about? Do your songs come from your heart and give thanks and praise to God? Maybe you have a problem singing, not because you are a bad singer but because you don't have the joy in your heart that causes you to sing. Maybe you feel detached from God because of your way of life and you struggle to sing. Dear friend, there is nothing like confessing your sin and renewing that relationship with your God and Saviour. The house speaks of our body and pilgrimage would speak of the life we live on earth. A statute means a divine direction to obtain our obedience; there is great joy for us when we are obedient to the Word of God. Psalm 40:3, *"And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and trust in the LORD."* Our lives as Christians can speak volumes to others. As we read the Bible, there are many things in it that should make our hearts sing.

Psalm 119:55 brings before us the third mention of the word "remember."

- Psalm 119:49, *"Remember the word unto thy servant"*;
- Psalm 119:52, *"I remembered thy judgments of old"*; and here in
- Psalm 119:55, *"I have remembered thy name, O LORD."*

Perhaps this is the most precious of all. In Malachi 3:16 we read about the faithful remnant: *"...them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name."* His name meant everything to them; the LORD knew it and He appreciated it. How much does the name of Jesus mean to you? In Matthew 18:20 we are reminded of the words of Jesus that *"where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."* Dear fellow believer, these verses should encourage us. Many of us gather together in small numbers to remember the Lord, but oh what joy we have when we come together in His name, and claim His promise that He is with us! There is also joy for the Lord as He hears our thanksgiving and prayers.

The "night" in the Bible sometimes speaks of a time of terror, trouble, tears, temptation and tragedy. Often if something or someone is troubling you, you become anxious in the night, you can't sleep, your mind is racing, your feel agitated and you are struggling to be at peace. The psalmist had troubles and his way of peace was that he remembered his LORD in the night. He could think about the LORD because he had been faithful to the law of God, or for you and me today, the Bible. There was no sin in his life that would keep him from enjoying thoughts about the Lord. His heart was right and he could meditate upon the LORD and be happy and be at peace as he remembered all the many precious promises the LORD had made.

Dear friends, what are your thoughts as you lay your heads on your pillow or as you waken during the night. It would be wonderful if your thoughts were always drawn to the name of our Lord. Another way of looking at this is that sometimes our spiritual experience is comparable to the night when things are dark; we are restless and long for the morning to dawn.

In Psalm 119:56 the psalmist ends this section with the words, "This I had, because I kept thy precepts." The Amplified Bible says *"This I have had [as the gift of Your grace and as my reward]: that I have kept Your precepts [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying them]."* The first time I read this, I thought that the psalmist was speaking of the experience he previously enjoyed because now he was not in the good of these things. But, after careful study, I think he was acknowledging the Lord's grace in his life and one reason for this was that he was continuing in obedience to the Word of God.

Dear friends, this little section we have studied underlines the importance of reading and studying the Bible, which is the Word of God. We have been reminded that the Bible brings hope, comfort, life, singing and peace. But to have the daily enjoyment of these things, we must be obedient to the Word of God. God demands it. The Bible is the handbook for life and, as we said at the beginning, it is our sword and shield which we must put on daily (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

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