

WINESKINS IN THE SMOKE

Psalm 119:81-88

My soul faints for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word. My eyes fail from searching Your word, saying, "When will You comfort me?" For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, yet I do not forget Your statutes. How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me? The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to Your law. All Your commandments are faithful; They persecute me wrongfully; Help me! They almost made an end of me on earth, but I did not forsake Your precepts. Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

I'd like to first give you the summation of where I'll be heading in this message. There is much that can be gleaned from this passage and from the chapter of Psalm 119. Little gold nuggets, if you will. Of all things that could be considered, we can find that what is pronounced in this passage of Scripture, which IS the Word of God, is the immense **value** of the Word of God in our day to day living and also of how it keeps us in the hope that we are promised through all of lifes trials and tribulations. Trials that test our faith and tribulations that remind us that there is a true enemy of our souls, the spiritual forces of evil and wickedness, that will try to get us believing a lie, that will try to get us to give up hope, that will try to get us judging one another and slandering one another, and hating one another, and not loving one another, and that will try and steer us away from God's Word and His promises, chiefly of the promise of eternal life in Christ by believing on Jesus as being our Savior, being forgiven of all our sin, of believing that we can walk in the newness of life, that we can live a life to the fullness, a life more abundant, that we can bear much fruit for the glory of God and that God Almighty is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, to those who continue to look to Jesus, as the author and finisher of our faith and that He will one day reward us for all of the good works that we let Him do through us, believing that God is faithful as He has declared and promised, and He will finish what He has begun in us, if we will just believe in His Word, His Truth, His Promise and hold onto that Truth, declare that truth, and not give away that Truth to unbelief. Also, in God's promises to us is that God will never leave us or forsake us, that He will lead us as Jesus is our Shepherd, He is our Way unto salvation and righteousness, that He gives His children His Holy Spirit to guide us in His way, and as was just mentioned He promises that He will carry out to completion what He started in us, if we let Him. Lastly but certainly not leastly is in this passage of Scripture of the promises of God and the hope that awaits us, is His lovingkindness, and mercies, and grace was not just for King David or whoever wrote KAPH in Psalm 119,

or to only those who are to be spiritual giants like Moses or Elijah or the Apostle Peter, it is for all who will believe and turn to Him, call upon Him, call upon the name of Jesus so that we find Him as we forsake our way that leads to death and look to His way that leads to life, eternal life, life everlasting. One other thing to mention before I move on is the fact that we are all in different places spiritually at each given moment. As Romans 14:5 says, "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." This isn't a competition with each other. We are called into the same body of Christ to be one in Him. We should always look first to our own relationship with God. Faith comes from God. Love comes from God. Salvation comes from God. Deliverance comes from God. Healing comes from God. Then we are also to encourage one another with love, humility, and kindness, pointing one another to the One who **can** strengthen our faith, who **can** fill us with His love, who **can** give us eternal life through Christ Jesus, who **can** deliver us from the bondage of sin and evil spirits, who **can** give healing to our hearts, minds, body, and soul. What we are called to is to share the love and gospel of Jesus Christ. We are just dust. But, all things are possible with God. Believe it! God spoke that so it is true!

This passage of Scripture is from Psalm 119 which is the longest chapter in the Bible and is what is called an acrostic poem. Acrostic means, "a series of written lines or verses in which the first, last, or other particular letters form a word or phrase." In the case of Psalm 119, there are 22 sections, where the first section starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, then the second section starts with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and so on, through the 22 letters of the alphabet. With acrostic writings, sometimes the first letters of each section will form a word going vertically, like if the first letter of the first section was L, then the second section started with O, then V, then E, which forms the word love. But, in Psalm 119, it is just each letter of the Hebrew alphabet that begins each section. Without knowing all that, one may wonder why the first section is labeled Aleph, the second section Beth, the third section Gimel, and the fourth section Daleth. 5 is He, 6 is Waw, 7 is Zayin, 8 is Heth, 9 is Teth, and 10 is Yod, and then for our passage of Scripture today, it starts with Kaph, K-A-P-H, the eleventh letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Also to note, each section has 8 verses. What was the intention of writing Psalm 119 as such? That has been discussed greatly since the time of its publication but I can only surmise that perhaps it was a good way to memorize important aspects of God's ways, since each section was but 8 verses. It can be compared in some ways to the pithy sayings that are in Proverbs that helps one to remember and use God's Word in their daily lives such as Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

You may wonder, as I did, what is the importance of Psalm 119, as it doesn't have one continuous flow of thought from the first section to the last. A quote I got from a commentary said, "Since this is a Psalm glorifying God and His Word, it refers to Scripture over and over again. The psalm is remarkable for how often it refers to God's written revelation, His word. It is referred to in almost every verse. The Masorites said that the Word of God is mentioned in every verse except Psalm 119:122. Other people reckon differently (with disagreement about verses 84, 90, 121, and 132). But Scripture is mentioned in at least 171 of 176 verses." Martin Luther, who posted his 95 theses on the door of his church that is credited with leading the Protestant Reformation "professed that he prized this Psalm so highly, that he would not take the whole world in exchange for one leaf of it." Some great people have memorized this whole Psalm and found great blessing in doing so. John Ruskin (19th century British writer), William Wilberforce (19th century British politician who led the movement to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire), Henry Martyn (19th century pioneer missionary to India), and David Livingstone (19th century pioneer missionary to Africa). George Wishart was the Bishop of Edinburgh in the 17th century (not to be confused with another Scot by the same name who was martyred a century earlier). Wishart was condemned to death and would have been executed. But when he was on the scaffold he made use of a custom that allowed the condemned person to choose one psalm to be sung, and he chose Psalm 119. Before two-thirds of the psalm was sung, his pardon arrived and his life was spared." Something to keep in mind if you're ever on the gallows. It also speaks of the incredible amount of goodness that can be found in Psalm 119 and also of what we have in our text of KAPH.

Kaph starts out with, "my soul faints for your salvation." How many of you have felt that in periods of your life? I have, practically every day. Yet I'm reminded by the Lord, in His Word, that there are others who have not been brought to that place of longing for their Savior, or of even knowing that Jesus, the Christ died for their sins and therefore don't presently possess that hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. There are some who haven't yet "taste[d] and see[n] that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8) There are many of us who have not experienced or grasped the great depth of God's love in that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) There is some that haven't come to the realization that what happens when we are born again, when we have believed on Jesus to have died for our sins and that He was raised from the dead on the third day, conquering death so that we too can have that eternal life when we pass on from this world, that we are buried with Christ in baptism "in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" as the Apostle Paul said in Colossians 2:12. And in Romans 6:4 he said, "Therefore we were buried

with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Paul also explained in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." That, brothers and sisters is the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, shed His blood for the remission of our sins (taking away, washing away our sins), He rose from the grave so that we too will raise from the grave in death but that spiritually that begins when we believe on Christ and He places His Spirit in us, and we then begin to live according to the Spirit and not the desires of the flesh. That is where God is leading each of us to the full realization that our new life in Christ begins now even while we are still living in our present bodies.

The writer of KAPH knew that his salvation comes from the Lord God Himself, and that His hope was in His Savior and Lord. He continued in his suffering by searching the Word of God, looking for the comfort that could only come from His God, our God, and His Word, the same Word that we have before us. Incredible isn't it! This whole Bible that we have, the Holy Bible, IS the Word of God that we can find His Word of comfort to the satisfying of our souls. Psalm 107:9 says, "For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." If your soul doesn't long to be satisfied by the Word of God, I hope and pray even now that it does. You too can pray for your soul to long for the good things of God. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." You won't always feel like seeking God. You won't always feel like reading His Word. You won't always feel like doing God's will, loving your neighbor, or loving your enemy. Yet the more we seek God and seek Him in His Word, His Word will come to life in your souls. We find that to be a promise from His Word through our Savior Jesus Christ. He places His Spirit in us not only to testify with our spirit that we are his children but His Spirit then "works in us to will and to do according to His purpose." That's in Philippians 2:13. Just before that, the Apostle Paul said to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." We MUST continue to seek God, we MUST continue to be in His Word. Just because you say you're saved by believing on Jesus, you, I, We, must continue to pursue God and study His Word. That is what the writer in our passage of Scripture of Kaph was doing. He knew Who was his salvation yet he also knew he had to continue to read, meditate on, and study God's Word. He said, "My eyes fail from searching Your word, saying, "When will You comfort me?"" David knew all too well that as he continued to seek God and His comfort He needed to be in His Word continually. We absolutely cannot expect to live a victorious life in Christ without being in His Word. When Jesus spoke of abiding in Him in John 15, He was

saying that our whole existence is in Him, our whole life, our sustenance, our source of food and drink as He said He is the vine and we are the branches. Nevertheless we are given the choice to abide in Christ or not. Abiding in Him is in abiding in the Word and seeking God our Father. We can't expect anything but meager results with a mere meager effort at abiding in Christ, in reading His Word, in being in prayer. That's just the way God designed it and us. He wants us to abide in Him. He loves us, He created us to abide in Him. We are living contrary to God's design and plan unless we are abiding in Him and His Word.

The writer of Kaph said, "For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, yet I do not forget Your statutes." In a commentary on Biblehub I found a good explanation to the wineskin in the smoke. "The wine-bottles of the East were skins. It was a custom of the ancients to hang skins of wine in the smoke of a fire, for very much the same reason that we stand a bottle of claret on the hearth, in order to mellow the wine by a gradual and moderate warmth, and to bring it to an earlier perfection. And in that custom the psalmist finds an illustration of the meaning, and of the mercy, of the afflictions to which he has been exposed. They have been sent to act on him like the warm smoke on the wine - to refine, mellow, and ripen his character; and because, under them all, he has refused to part with his faith in God and duty; because he has been true to God and God's statutes, they have had their intended and proper effect upon him. This explanation gives a fresh suggestion to the text, but it may be doubted whether the mood of the psalmist is fairly represented by it. The older view seems more in harmony with the general tone of the stanza. Though, under the severe pressures of trial and affliction, the good man shrinks and wastes and blackens like a wine-skin hung in the smoke of the chimney, he still remembers the Divine statutes, and holds fast his faith in God and duty. What seems to be in mind is a long waiting-time, which was also a time of suffering and strain"

Whatever the case may be, whether we look at our lives as being mellowed with age in the smoke or through trials and tribulations we are being almost burnt in a fire with the damaging effects of the smoke, we are all NOT guaranteed a life of charm and comfort. Quite the opposite actually. We must remember that, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Not only that, we all live in a fallen, sin-filled world full of all kinds of evil. Just as our Lord and Savior Jesus had to suffer and overcome so must we. The Apostle Paul said, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." But Paul knew that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

We must all suffer in our lives for the short time that we are here on this earth. What is good enough for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ should be good enough for us. Yet we must keep seeking Him and His Word. That suffering though is not in being in bondage to sin and evil spirits, it is not in questioning our salvation day in and day out, it is not in being fruitless and barren. We are assured that the fruit of the Spirit that works in us brings forth, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. We are assured that God is the Great Healer, Deliverer, and Savior. If anyone needs healing, He can do it! If anyone needs assurance, He can give it! If anyone wants to be saved, call upon the Lord Jesus Christ and He WILL save you. Once again, as I have said before, keep the faith brothers and sisters, keep loving one another, and forgiving one another, keep reading His Word, keep seeking God and His mercies and His grace and one day we will all be rewarded for the faith that He instilled in us to do His good works.