

Week #11

➤ Kaph

Psalm 119:81-88

"Persecution"

(Stories in this Lesson are taken from "Extreme Devotion", published by Voice of the Martyrs.)

Psalm 119:81-88

81 My soul faints for Your salvation,
But I hope in Your word.

- What has the Psalmist been waiting for...but it doesn't seem to have come?

This isn't talking about "salvation" in the sense of asking Jesus to be your Savior. This is talking about waiting and waiting for God to rescue from a horrible situation. As we look at the rest of this 8-verse passage, I think we'll see that this horrible situation is probably persecution.

Persecution – let's define it.

Wikipedia defines it: **Persecution** is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group by another group. The most common forms are [religious persecution](#), [ethnic persecution](#), and [political persecution](#), though there is naturally some overlap between these terms.

And Encarta Encyclopedia says: **Persecution**, determined effort of a government to punish, silence, or bring into obedience, usually in violation of normal moral and legal restrictions.

The Psalmist is experiencing persecution, and has grown weary of waiting for God to deliver him.

- Can you think of a story from scripture of anyone who waited and waited for God to rescue them, and He just didn't seem to come?

The scripture is full of such stories. Some of them ended with the Lord stepping in and saving. Some of them seemingly did not. Just look at [Hebrews 11:37-40](#). Just a few situations are described there which show us that sometimes the Lord lets the unthinkable happen.

- What is our hope in such a situation?

The Word of God. The Words of scripture will refresh our hearts. Give us courage. Keep us going for one more day. One more hour. Bolster us up until we see the end of what God is accomplishing. We will either see it on this earth...or we'll see it from the vantage point of heaven. But we will see it. And the Word of God keeps that hope alive in our hearts.

The following true story is taken from "Extreme Devotion" :

The Pastor, his wife, and their six small children had just read Psalm 23 while eating breakfast. Suddenly, the police burst into his home to search the house and arrest him.

The police asked him, "Don't you have anything to say? Have you no sorrow or regret?" The Pastor said carefully, "You are the answer to what we prayed today. We just read in Psalm 23 that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. We had a table but no enemies. Now you have come. If you would like anything that is on the table, I would like to share it with you. You were sent by God."

"How could you say such stupid things? We will take you to prison, and you will die there. You will never see your children again." With continued ease, the Pastor continued, "We also read about that today: 'Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear.' "

The officer shouted, "Everyone fears death. I know because I have seen it on their faces."

"A shadow of a dog can't bite you, and a shadow of death can't kill you. You can kill us or put us in prison, but nothing bad can happen to us. We're in Christ, and if we die, He will take us to His world."

82 My eyes fail *from searching* Your word,
Saying, "When will You comfort me?"

- Now it looks like things have gone from bad to worse for the Psalmist. Not only is he waiting and waiting for God to rescue him, but he also has gone to God's Word again and again for hope, and now it seems even his hope has dried up. Has this ever happened to you?

83 For I have become like a wineskin in smoke,
Yet I do not forget Your statutes.

- A wineskin left near the smoke of a fire becomes black with the residue from the smoke. Why would this describe the situation the Psalmist seems to be in?
- But, even though persecution or difficulty is very pressing, and even though hope seems to be nearly gone, and even though blackness seems to be covering everything....yet....what does the Psalmist keep remembering?
- What does this tell us about the Words of God?

"...seven, eight, nine – you! Step out!" The Nazi guard yelled at the woman. The commandant had ordered every tenth prisoner executed as punishment for two women's escape the previous night.

"Please have mercy on me! I have a child." The tenth woman pleaded.

Mary Skotsobaugh stood next in line. In her heart Mary heard "*Step forward and say you wish to die in her place.*" She replied to the inner voice, "Why? She is not a Christian. She is a Jewish Communist. When the Nazis are overthrown and the Communists come to power, they will be as bad as the Nazis."

Then Mary remembered that it was Good Friday. The voice said, "*On this day I died not for the good ones but for the bad ones, for sinners.*"

Mary stepped forward. "I wish to die."

The officer laughed. "If you are stupid enough to die in her place, all right, you come forward. Her turn will come soon enough."

As Mary went to be executed and burned in the ovens, she told them, "When God took His people out of slavery in Egypt, it is written in our Bible that he walked before them in a column of fire. I pray when my body burns it would be a column of fire that will show you the way to God."

84 How many *are* the days of Your servant?

When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?

- What is the Psalmist asking now?

He is asking for justice. He has a right to ask for justice. The Psalmist is wanting an end to suffering. It's normal to want an end to suffering.

But, as we saw in Lesson #10, sometimes God waits to bring it to pass. And sometimes as we wait, we are strengthened. **Isaiah 40:31**

The two women traveled week after week to attend secret house-church meetings. They were tired and frustrated that no church existed in their own village.

After praying for months for a church nearby, one of the women said, "Maybe God is waiting for us to build a church. Why should He listen to our constant complaints if we are not willing to do something ourselves?"

So they decided to take a risk. The two women and their husbands built a church in their little village in the Anhui province of China. The government immediately threatened to tear the building down unless they registered with the religious affairs bureau. They complied, and fortunately their rural area was not as closely supervised as some of the larger city churches. They even dared to invite other house-church pastors as guest speakers without first acquiring written permission.

The women evangelized by visiting the local hospital and finding the patients that had no hope of recovery. Then they would

pray and ask God to heal them. In one year, the budding church grew to over two hundred!

One of the sisters said, "We prayed twenty days straight for one man, and he wasn't healed until the very end. The family started threatening violence against us, saying that we were angering the gods. You have to be willing to take risks for God.

85 The proud have dug pits for me,
Which *is* not according to Your law.

- Here's the description of what's been happening to the Psalmist. Proud people have _____. In other words....?
- What are some ways people can mess up our reputations, even though we have done nothing wrong?
- What can we do about such a situation?

86 All Your commandments *are* faithful;
They persecute me wrongfully;
Help me!

- Here's the answer to the question above. What can we do? Cry out to God for help. He is the only One who can overturn the power of lies.
- Take a look, in the verses below, of the many times the proud dug pits for Jesus, and accused Him of things He had not done wrong....or accused Him of things He had done and they called them wrong when they weren't....How did Jesus' reputation get restored once the lies began to circulate about Him during His ministry?
 - 1) In John 5:16, the Jews tried to kill Jesus because He had "broken the Sabbath."
 - 2) In John 5:17, the Jews tried even harder to kill Jesus because He said that He was equal with God.
 - 3) In John 6:15, some Jews wanted to force Jesus to be their earthly King, because He had given them bread to eat.
 - 4) In John 6:41, the Jews complained about Him because He said He was the Bread of Heaven. They ridiculed Him because they knew who his parents were...and it was obvious to them that He had not come down from heaven.

- 5) In John 6:51, the Jews were very angry at Jesus because He said they should eat His flesh.
- 6) In John 6:60, many of those who had been His disciples stopped following Him because they didn't like the things He was saying. It was too hard.
- 7) In John 7:3&4, Jesus' own brothers ridiculed Him because He didn't seem to be trying to promote Himself enough.
- 8) In John 7:12, many thought Jesus was a man who was trying to deceive people.
- 9) In John 7:15, many noticed that Jesus was a brilliant speaker, but they put him down because he had not gotten the religious training they respected.
- 10) In John 7:19 Jesus confronted them with the fact that they were plotting to kill Him, and they threw slurs at Him, saying He had a devil in Him.
- 11) In John 7:28-30, Jesus told them He knew God, and they wanted to kill Him.
- 12) In John 7:42, the learned Jews, trying to accuse Jesus with His own scriptures, spread the lie that He couldn't be the Messiah, because the Messiah would come from the line of David, and from Bethlehem, whereas everyone knew Jesus came from Galilee. Smile.
- 13) In John 7:48-49, the Pharisees ridiculed the soldiers who were impressed by Jesus. They said that Jesus certainly couldn't be believed by anyone, because no one really important had believed Him. How could the stupid small people believe in Him, then?
- 14) In John 8:6, the scribes and Pharisees tried to ruin Jesus' teachings by giving Him an impossible situation to deal with. They tried to trick Him, but failed.
- 15) In John 8:13, the Pharisees refused to believe what He said about Himself because He didn't have anyone else to be a witness to the truth of what He said. He refuted their lies with the truth – He wasn't alone in what He said about Himself – the Father had also confirmed it.
- 16) In John 8:41, the Jews accuse Jesus of being born of fornication.
- 17) In John 8:48, the Jews throw racial slurs at Him (calling Him a Samaritan), and they again say He has a devil.
- 18) In John 8:59, the Jewish leaders are at their limit with Jesus. They have believed nothing He has said. They have told as many lies as they could. And yet He keeps on speaking the truth to them. They end up trying to stone Him, but He escapes.

- 19) In John 9, the Jewish leaders ridicule and are cruel to one whom Jesus cured of blindness.
- 20) In John 10:20 they say again that Jesus has a devil.
- 21) In John 10:32&33 Jesus asks them why they are trying to hurt Him when He has done so many wonderful things for them. They call Him a blasphemer because He says the truth: He is God.
- 22) In John 11:53, the Jewish leaders grow deadly serious about finding a way to kill Him, since He has done the unthinkable – He has raised Lazarus from the dead.
- 23) In John 11:57 the chief priests and Pharisees put forth an order to all the people gathering at the Passover feast, that if they even see Jesus they must report it.
- 24) In John 12:10, the chief priests and Pharisees consider even trying to kill Lazarus, too.
- 25) In John 12:34, the people twist scripture, asking Jesus why He talks about dying when everyone knows the Messiah lives forever.
- 26) In John 18:27, we see a startling contrast between Jesus' calmly continuing to speak the truth, and Peter vehemently lying in order to save his own skin.
- 27) In John 18:33, Pilate questions Jesus about whether or not He has claimed to be the King of the Jews – a lie told to Pilate by the Jewish rulers.
- 28) In John 19:7, the Jewish leaders clamor for Jesus' death because Jesus had been so bold as to tell them the truth – He is God.
- 29) In John 19:12, the Jewish leaders falsely accuse Jesus of being a threat to Roman authority.
- 30) In Matthew 27:62-66, the Jewish leaders put in place a plan to keep the followers of Jesus from fooling everyone about Him rising from the dead.
- 31) In Matthew 18:11-15, the plan of the Jewish leaders failed, in fact back-fired, and they covered it up with more lies and bribes.

87 They almost made an end of me on earth,
But I did not forsake Your precepts.

- What is the one thing we must cling to when all else is falling apart?

Here's a true story from Cuba: Rose

"I was born in a Communist home where no one could even mention the word "God". My parents are atheists. My father is in the Cuban Communist Party leadership. My mother is secretary of the committee for the Defense of the Revolution. You might say my home is a nest for Communism. However, my grandmother loves God and taught me about the Lord. She sowed the seeds of God's Word into me. On several occasions I tried to go to church with her, but my parents did not allow it."

"One day, I received the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. My life started to change. Even the way I dressed changed. My mother did not accept it. She never beat me before, but now she often does. When my father learned that I was a Christian, he told me to choose God or him. I chose God because I have understood that He is the only one worth living for."

"Now, even though I am only fourteen, I have to study far away from my home. When I first came to this place I was the only Christian, but I have sown God's Word and now there are four of us. We meet under a tree – hidden – to share God's Word. We keep sowing and waiting, believing that soon we will be many."

88 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness,
So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

- The very normal, natural, easy thing to do in times of persecution is learn to hate your persecutors. Did Jesus do this? Luke 23:34.
- Did Stephen do this? Acts 7:59&60
- To love our persecutors is impossible for us. What makes it possible?

One final story from "Extreme Devotion":

"My wife is sleeping in the other room because she has been ill." Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand began. "She and I are both Jewish. Her family perished in the same Nazi concentration camp where you just boasted of killing Jews with children still in their arms. Perhaps you murdered my wife's family."

Upon hearing this, the pastor's guest, a soldier, became very angry and stood to leave. But Richard stopped him. "Wait. I want to propose an experiment. I want to tell my wife who you are and what you did. But my wife will not curse you or even look at you angrily. She will accept you."

The man sat with his mouth open, speechless.

The pastor continued, "Now if my wife, who is only human can forgive you – then how much more will Jesus love and forgive you?"

The man buried his face in his hands. "What have I done? How can I go on living with the guilt of so much blood? Jesus, please forgive me." The soldier went on to give his life to Christ."

Then Richard went and woke his wife, Sabrina. "This is the murderer of your sisters, your brothers, and your parents," he introduced the man. "But now he has repented." She wrapped her hands around his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." I Cor. 13:13

Your Assignment for next week:

- Read "Lamed" – Psalm 119: 89-96
(about one verse per day)
- Answer the following questions as you read through this passage this week.
 - Memorize Psalm 119:96

"I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad."

Week #12

ל Lamed

Discussion Questions

Psalm 119:89-96

"Forever"

Here's a new Hebrew word for us:

מ ל ו ל

M L W L

Lowlahm

"Forever"

(it means: "I can't see the end of it")

Psalm 119:89-96

What lasts forever? Make a list of the top five things you can think of which last forever.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

89 Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven.

- When you think of “forever”, what do you picture?
- What is one thing which we know for sure lasts forever?
- The word “settled” means “stands firm”. What does that tell you about the Word of God?

90 Your faithfulness *endures* to all generations;
You established the earth, and it abides.

- What proof do we have – which we can see with our eyes – that God’s love lasts?

91 They continue this day according to Your ordinances,
For all *are* Your servants.

- What things in our world have existed from the day God made them to today?
- Who...or what....is the Psalmist talking about when he says “all are your servants.”?

92 Unless Your law *had been* my delight,
I would then have perished in my affliction.

- Read Isaiah 54, and comment on how this chapter is a delight.

93 I will never forget Your precepts,
For by them You have given me life.

- Have you ever had a near-death experience? What do you remember about it? Why is it so easy to remember the details of this experience?

94 I *am* Yours, save me;
For I have sought Your precepts.

- How can I be so sure God will save me?

95 The wicked wait for me to destroy me,
But I will consider Your testimonies.

- The word “consider” tends to give us the wrong idea of what this verse is saying. It could also be translated: “give attention to”. How does that help you understand the verse?

96 I have seen the consummation of all perfection,
But Your commandment *is* exceedingly broad.

- Again, there is a word in this verse which keeps us from getting the full meaning for our day. The word “consummation” can also be translated “end”. Read the verse again, using the word “end”, instead of “consummation”, and ask yourself:
 - What things does our culture consider “perfect”?
 - Do all those things have an “end”?
- What does the Psalmist see that is perfect, and is so huge that he just can’t see the “end” of it?