

THE VICTORY LIFE

in

PSALM 119

by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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CHAPTER TWO

THE SHADOW OF DOUBT

BETH

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.

With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.

I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

I will delight myself in thy statutes:

I will not forget thy word” (Psalms 119:9-16).

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” (v. 9).

LIFE IS NEVER SO EARNEST or so real as when one has had a vision of a closer walk with God.

But while vision is the prerequisite to victory of this sort, it is by no means the guarantee. The murmuring and repining Israelites saw the Promised Land from afar without entering. They envisioned giants of such colossal proportions that they themselves were dwarfed to the size of grasshoppers in comparison. What hideous monsters the devil can parade before the imagination of men!

How many fearful hearts have been intimidated thereby!

The psalmist looks up. The highlands of spiritual living are inviting to his awakened soul, but the heights seem so prohibitive. “If such a holy estate is possible,” he seems to be reasoning, “is it probable that I shall enter into it?”

Pondering the probability is a logical sequence to his stated desire. He is well aware of his faults, his habits, his sins. They stand out in bold relief on the screen of his conscience. Then there is the consideration of companions who will not share such an outlook. Old ambitions, too, loom demandingly. These are, conceivably, his disturbing problems as the new morning dawns.

The day after a spiritual victory is a serious period.

Elijah one day withstood a company of Baal's prophets; the next day, he fled from Jezebel. He was resplendent with unwavering faith on Mt. Carmel calling down fire from Heaven; later, he was pathetic in his despondency beneath a juniper tree. Satan will ever attempt to offset spiritual gains. The author of confusion will do his utmost to frustrate the mind and heart of the one who has tasted victory in the Lord.

Again the psalmist looks at the examples portrayed.

If he bears any remote likeness to us, he would reason that their temperament must have been more conducive to a holy life. Perhaps they did not have to disentangle themselves from so many unspiritual enterprises. What a subtle type of self-pity!

We all are prone to think that others were never called upon to endure the same difficulties which confront us. Our pains and misfortunes are more severe; our obstacles more forbidding; our distances longer. "**All thy billows and thy waves are passed over me**" Jonah moaned.

Last night's decision meets its real test today.

Now we will discover whether the psalmist meant it when he stated his desire, above all else, to be directed of the Lord. Was he really sincere?

One full look at this young man and our questions are satisfactorily answered. He meant it indeed. We get the impression that he is rolling up his sleeves, clenching his fists, ready to bend and break every circumstance to fulfill his heart's desire. Of course, he errs in method, but he is firm in determination.

He seems to feel he must move out on the field of conquest and strive for victory.

It is a common type of forgetfulness that the battle of a believer is not his but the Lord's.

- Jehoshaphat could have spared himself much mental anguish and untold heart concern had he been aware of this fact.
- Peter could have negotiated the full distance in walking on the water had he kept his eyes on the Lord.
- The terrified sailors in the Galilean tempest preferred at length to bail out the water rather than seek the assistance of the Christ.

Jesus said, "**Without me ye can do nothing.**" Desperation is the best agent to prove this fact.

Our friend is a realist.

With one sweeping inventory of his attitudes and actions — a diagnosis of his conduct — he asks, in substance, “How can sufficient change be wrought in my life to put me on a plane with those who walk uprightly in the path of holiness?”

It is an age-long question. Nicodemus, in his midnight interview with the Lord relative to the new birth, exclaimed, “**How can these things be?**”

But the question, “**Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?**” is timely and pertinent.

Until it is answered intelligently, satisfactorily, scripturally, the holiest longing in the breast of man will be dashed to the earth and all the demons of hell will have a holiday of glee over the defeat.

“**Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?**”

Is there an answer? There is! It is a mark of spiritual immaturity and blind leadership to dismiss the question with the flat assertion that no one can cleanse his way.

Paul strongly exhorted, “**Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**” (II Corinthians 7:1).

A man, young or older, may cleanse his way “**by taking heed thereto according to thy [God's] word**” (v. 9).

The spiritual life (and the moral with it) is kept clean by the washing of the water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26). There is no other means. The examples of the holy life (vv. 1, 2) had no other means of realizing their joyful experience of walking with the Lord.

Enoch walked and talked with God.

He was a man of faith, and faith is taking God at His Word. In no other way can one get along with the Lord, The redemptive program is creative, corrective and constructive. It is also purgative. Wayward tendencies, evil desires, unholy scheming and unscriptural activities must be corrected if the new man created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Ephesians 2:10) is to know life on the higher plane.

Purging induces the correction and makes it possible.

“**O let me not wander!**” (v. 10) is the cry which follows in rapid succession.

The psalmist's head is bowed. He has looked once again at the godly examples (vv. 1, 2) marching fearlessly and unwaveringly down the pathway of devotion.

His heart is with them but his mind is dubious. Yet, a holy walk is possible. Of this fact he is assured, though the probability for him seems very faint indeed. He knows the tendency of his feet. He is none the less earnest. His desire is not lessening. The difficulty lies in the fact that he is visualizing victory in the light of his own will power. For the moment, he is not encouraged. He fears that he will fail.

But who had called him? Who was it that wanted his obedience, his devotion, his love? Whose word is it which offers cleansing? Ah, his slipping feet are arrested. His thoughts turn heavenward.

“Blessed are thou, O Lord” (v. 12), he quickly affirms.

The light of desire is still burning. Hope can never perish when one is praising the Lord. The heart cannot faint when it is pouring the fragrance of love into the hearing ear of the infinite God. Let there be apparent mistakes and gross shortcomings in the life, one is on hopeful ground who praises God from whom all blessings flow.

His praise is accompanied with a request to be taught.

And what may be said about the willingness of the Lord to grant such instruction?

“Come ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (Psalm 34:11).

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me” (Matthew 11:29).

What possibilities for believers! What avenues of usefulness! What wholesome enjoyment!

According to verse 13, the psalmist had made some attempt to declare the Truth of God. Now he expresses a hope that he may increase his ability and extend his usefulness. Anyone of us will be quick to conjecture that his doubt will soon be dissipated.

It is fortunate that the psalmist was cognizant of his weakness. It is not amiss for him to confess his proneness to wander. It proves that he is facing facts.

It also proves that he is concerned. Such concern, when once it grips the heart, demands help. Such help is always available.

Among the golden promises from Heaven are these: **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him . . . in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct their paths.”**

When we hear this suppliant say, **“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”** (v. 11), we would like to steal up to his side and whisper in his ear that yesterday's faith will not win today's battles.

You will of course observe the tense of the verb.

Because on one yesterday he had hid God's Word in his heart, and because today he finds uncleanness in his life and a proneness to wander from the divine precepts, is he unwittingly questioning the power of the Scriptures? Did he believe he could take something of a shortcut to spiritual victory? Did he think that by one past act he had become immunized from sin once for all?

Why does he not reveal a present, continuous practice, especially since he has now such a pronounced longing to be holy? In this moment of heart searching he reveals, among other things, a past act and a present condition. He had hid God's Word in his heart; he is in need of cleansing. He wants to know how he can rightly and successfully dissociate himself from unspiritual companions and from pursuits which are inappropriate for one bent upon a walk with God.

It is in the nature of man to try to drive bargains with the Lord.

Children in the home often think they have a better way, some faster method, some more acceptable course than that contained in parental instruction. The children of God have something of the same trait. But the command is clear. The Scriptures are to be heeded. This is a day by day application, a moment by moment obedience. The manna was sent down to the Israelites daily. They were obliged to gather it daily. Divine compassions are new every morning because we need daily renewing.

Pottery may assume some grotesque characteristics while in the process of molding, but with each turn of the wheel or with each application of the tool, shapeliness becomes more and more evident. And never doubt the divine Potter. One who submits to Him as the clay will find the Hands of Perfection ever adding touches which will produce a vessel sanctified and meet for the Master's use.

Now take a look at our struggling psalmist. There is a change both in attitude and outlook. The last two verses of stanza two contain four "**I wills.**" These are expressed with studied exactness and with sanctified determination. "**I will meditate in thy precepts . . . I will have respect unto thy ways . . . I will delight myself in thy statutes . . . I will not forget thy word.**"

What an impressive combination of wholesome promises. They reveal consideration, respect, pleasure and remembrance — all with regard to the Word of God. If there was any confusion of thought, any misunderstanding of basic principles, any divergent leaning, or any unwillingness to comply, every trace of it is absent in these remarkable utterances. It would seem that the adversary is retreating and the seeker of higher ground is gaining altitude. At least, the emphasis is better; the probability brighter.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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