



Message: The Answer For Those Who Taunt

Passage: Psalm 119:41-48

Series: Psalm 119

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What do you do when you've been taunted, maligned, belittled and publicly made fun? Surely it has happened to you, for it has happened to all of us. The taunter's aim was to make you feel small, insignificant, weird, like you don't belong. Why does it hurt so much? Do you recall the emotions that ran through your veins? The blood that rushed to your face, and turned it red with shame? The questioning of self: *am I really weird? Are they right?* Do you remember the indecision of how to respond? Do you deny that for which you're being maligned? And say "*No I'm not... that's not true!*" Or my personal childhood favorite: "*I know you are but what am I?*" Do you fight back, and point out their own shortcomings, fight fire with fire, and trade blow for blow? Do you run in shame, and attempt to hide any weakness that they could identify in the future?

We have all experienced taunting because that is the way the world establishes dominance through shaming, using whatever tools available. These tools could be power, education and knowledge, affluence, influence, or social status. It is common among children, but adults employ it as well!

People of faith, we experience taunting. Because we believe in an unseen God the world has accused us of willful ignorance, and that we are incapable of science. Because we have based our lives upon ancient writings over 2000 years old, and we maintain the same view on morality, sexuality, marriage, the the dignity of human life, we are viewed as archaic, and thus alienated from today's culture. We are taunted as unintelligent, naive, gullible, and as leaning on a crutch. We are called bigots, haters, ignorant and arrogant people who believe in myths. We are despised, taunted by the world and they expect no intelligible answer. **Christians, what is our answer? How do we respond?**

That is the message of our passage today. We are in Psalm 119, our 11 year series. We turn to this Psalm at the beginning of January, and then midway through the year. It is the longest chapter in Psalter, and is an acrostic poem in the Hebrew alphabet. The Psalm is centered on praising the written word of God. Each line of this 8 stanza poem begins with a letter, and the letter in verse 41-48 is the letter *waw*.

Open your bibles and turn to Psalm 119. It's in the middle of your bible. Look for verses 41-48. Let's stand together and read.

Passage: Psalm 119:41–48

Waw

- [41] Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD,
your salvation according to your promise;
[42] then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.
[43] And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
for my hope is in your rules.
[44] I will keep your law continually,
forever and ever,
[45] and I shall walk in a wide place,
for I have sought your precepts.
[46] I will also speak of your testimonies before kings
and shall not be put to shame,
[47] for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.
[48] I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes. (ESV)

From our passage we will see the answer to the question: *What is our response to those who taunt us?* Here is the answer from the text:

We Respond From Faith (41-42)
In His Mercy (43)
Displayed In Our Lives (44-45)
Revealed In Our Speech (46-47)
And Displayed In Our Worship (48)

Would you pray with me...

How do we respond to the one who taunts?

We Respond From Faith (1-2)

What is taunting? The Hebrew word for “taunt” expressed the idea of sharp words, causing injury to the flesh. It is like a cutting with the tongue: to cut down to size, to cause a sting, to stab at.

What is the target of the one who taunts? What I discern is this: the target of the taunting is what you place your identity in. This is why it stings like it does, it is an attempt to cut at the very core of a person. What kind of taunting have you experienced? Was it an attack on your physical appearance? Intellect? How about your poverty? Or social status? Or your faith, and virtue? Faith in God was likely the subject of the taunting we read in this passage. Is there anything more foundational to our identity, Christians, than our faith in God? I believe, based on the petition of the Psalmist, this was the ground of the attack. Look at Verse 41: ***Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise.***

Psalm 42:3 presented a similar attack: *My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”* If the aim of one who taunts is to cut at and attack your identity. Where was the identity of the Psalmist located? In the steadfast love and salvation of God, which was promised by the unchangeable word of God.

Church, how do we respond when being singled out, belittled, made to feel small, weak, unintelligent, or insignificant? The better question might be: from where do we respond when taunted— from fear or faith? One is a gospel response, one is not. Let me delineate the difference.

A response from fear displays hurt and anger. This response will fight with words or fists in the moment, or will store up bitterness, anger, and malice, and slander the person afterwards. You might be thinking: *Wait... if the person is willing to stand and fight their accuser, how is it a response of fear?* Because the fear is not merely a response to the one who taunts, but the fear of man. When one responds to taunting with hurt or anger, it is an indication that one’s identity is unsettled, and the ego is hurt. Fear will protect what it believes to be true and fight to maintain that image before other people. The one who responds from fear does so because they have placed their self-worth in the perception and acceptance of others instead of God. It is a flesh-based identity that responds to taunting from fear, that then displays itself with anger and hate.

How would one respond from faith? This passage shows us the way. We respond first from an identity that has been formed and fortified by the word of God. Look at verse 42: *then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word.*

We must highlight the absolute importance of the word of God. The entirety of Psalm 119 is about the love of the word of God. What does the word of God teach us about our identity? That we were made after God's image. We are chosen, called, predestined, loved, adopted, heirs according to his promise, and children of God. We have been a new nature, were buried with Christ in baptism, raised with him in his resurrection, hid with Christ in God and are seated with him in the heavens. Nothing can separate us from His love— not life, nor death, nor angels, nor powers or principalities, nor famine or nakedness or peril or sword! Our identity has been secured in the steadfast love and salvation of God.

The response from faith proceeds from one who knows this, that their identity has been wrapped up in the saving love of God. It is firm, unchangeable, immovable, and secure. Therefore, the taunting of the world cannot truly hurt us! Notice, the taunting of the Psalmist did not produce anger, or fear! The response of the Psalmist wasn't to malign the accuser, but to ask that salvation would come so they would have an answer for them. The answer the psalmist asked for wasn't that they would taunt, injure, or harm their opponent in return. Instead, they asked for a display of God's steadfast love and salvation. The Psalmist believed in the power and might of God, that God would do what he said he would do. He responded from a disposition of faith!

We respond to taunting ... from faith...
And that faith is rooted...

In His Mercy (43)

Would we not assume the next verse would be a petition for judgement? “*Bring down your fire, Oh God! Slay my foe!*” *What do we see instead?* The psalmist petitions for mercy! **43** *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules!*

The temptation when taunted is to fight fire with fire. If your hope is in your flesh— your identity rooted in your flesh, then the response will be to protect your own power and glory, your own righteousness and self-worth, and when someone attacks your identity, you will respond through attack. The Psalmist recognized this, and knew the weakness of their own flesh. They knew the temptation was to hurl back insults. He felt the pull of the flesh to defend itself. But he didn’t...

What kind of grace is this, church? This is not the way of the world, but this is the way of Christ. This is the grace we learn from our Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:43-45 “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...* Paul speaks to this in Romans 12:14 “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*”

How do we do this? How do we overcome our desire to trade blow for blow, fight fire with fire? How did the Psalmist do this? He recognized his own need of mercy. Paul Tripp, in his book “*Dangerous Calling,*” spoke to this: *No one gives grace better than a person who knows he desperately needs it himself.*

Where do I get this? Again, verse 43, he pleads, *take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.* Friends, he recognized his own sinfulness. There was not moral high ground to stand on, and because he knew his need of grace was great, he was able to extend grace to his antagonist.

Dear friends, when you are sinned against, how often do you examine your own sinfulness? When you do, you will remember the the mercy you’ve received, and you will find room to extend grace. You will return to gospel, the source of your hope, the source of your identity. Oh, for that kind recognition of our own need for mercy!

When taunted, we respond from faith in His mercy, and this faith and mercy is ...

Displayed in Our Lives (44-45)

[44] I will keep your law continually, forever and ever,

How do we answer one who taunts? How do we answer one belittles our faith? We continue in obedience to the law of God—the very thing for which we are made fun of!

Do you know what is confusing—even confounding to the world? That we would continue trusting, believing, walking in the law of the Lord despite the shame the placed upon us. It makes no sense to the world that we would continue to live in obedience to a God unseen, and by a book they feel is outdated. The Psalmist pledged to keep this law and obey this God—the very thing they were taunted for, continually, forever and ever. Do you know how disarming that is to the one who taunts, when you feel no shame over what they attempt to shame you with? It takes the teeth out of their mouth, the sting out of their bite.

What also confuses those who taunt is that our experience of walking with God, according to His word, is one of freedom, and joy! Verse 45: *And I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts.*

The picture of walking in a wide place is an analogy for freedom. It's open fields of wild flowers, as the song would say! Contrast that to walking in a narrow place, where one's feet would stumble and fall. There is Blessing of keeping the law! God's law is good. He leads us away from that which would harm us, from inclosed spaces. The world would see the precepts of God as a ball and chain, we see it as an anchor in the storm, keeping us safe.

To change the metaphor, sailing according to God's precepts is sailing out on the open sea. Sailing according to our own way, our own sin, that's sailing along the reefs. It will lead to ship-wreck, loss of joy, loss of peace, and loss of life!

Christian, I can say this with certainty, walking in God's word has saved me from many heartaches. It has saved me from broken relationships, from the pain and misery that sin produces. What happens when we reject God's precepts? The Westminster children's catechism is a teaching tool based on a series of question and answers. *Q. 33. What befell our first parents when they had sinned? Answer: Instead of being holy and happy, they became sinful and miserable.*¹

The answer to him who taunts is displayed in the fruit of our lives! That fruit is of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Sin will bring about misery. The Spirit brings joy.

[When taunted, our answer is] Revealed in Our Speech

*[46] I will also speak of your testimonies before kings
and shall not be put to shame,*

*[47] for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.*

What is our response to being shamed, taunted? To boldly praise that which you love. To be unashamed of where you place your identity! To proclaim the testimonies of God! To do so before the most important of human men— kings!

The kings of the world, the most powerful and influential people. They had knowledge and the best teachers, affluence and influence, social status and competence. These are the people the Psalmist declared he would witness to—and not be put to shame. Shame is something you feel when you've done something foolish. It's a feeling of regret. The Psalmist said they would not feel regret in speaking boldly the gospel before the most important of human authority.

How could he do so? Because his identity was wrapped up in the steadfast love of God, and his hope was in his word. If your identity is rooted in the steadfast love of God, and you are firm in your trust of his word and salvation, then no amount of taunting, shaming, will keep you from proclaiming that which is most important to you.

We should note the words from the book we were given for our table groups, *Gospel Fluency: You speak about what you love*. It's here in the verse: *I will also speak of your testimonies... for I find my delight in your commandments which I love.*

Might it be that the answer to taunting would an enemy to a friend, from one who taunts to one who trusts? Is the gospel not the most important news for the world? Is not reconciliation between and and God the most important relational harmony needed?

Lastly, the answer to those who taunt is...

Displayed In Our Worship

[48] I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes. (ESV)

Recall verse 41— *let your steadfast love come to me, Oh Lord, Your salvation, according to your word!* The Psalmist now reflects that plea, in body, by lifting his hands to the word, an acknowledgement of salvation from the commandments of God! To lift one's hands toward something is an act of worship. What was the psalmist shamed for? The worship of God. Shamed because he had put his trust in God. The response of the Psalmist was not to back away or hide his devotion, but to courageously display it in the lifting of hands.

Think through this last point with me. To worship something or someone by the lifting of hands is taking a position of vulnerability. This is why many find it difficult to do in our public worship gatherings. We know intuitively that the lifting of our hands is a posture of one who needs.

I recently read an article on the lifting of hands². In this article, the author explained her study that the examples in the Bible of lifted hands implied a surrender to God. The first example was Moses in a battle with the Amalikes in Ex 17. As long as Moses' hands (and staff) were lifted, the Israelites prevailed. When his hands drooped, the Amalakites prevailed. What was the significance? The lifted hands indicated a surrender to God. It was an acknowledgement that the people of Israel needed help; this task was impossible without God. But surrender is not merely an acknowledgement that the other party is stronger. A willful surrender is also worship. A biblical surrender is also faith that God will help, that it is His delight to help and serve the people he loves.

The Psalmist displayed their weakness to their opponent through worship, through surrender. This is counter-intuitive, isn't it? It is the opposite of what the flesh wants to do when taunted! The flesh wants to hide weakness and show strength, but the reborn man is content to show his weakness, for in his weakness, the Spirit of God is strong!

Where is your strength, church? Where is your hope? Where does your help come from? Will you acknowledge your source, for your identity and strength, to the world? This is what we are called to do. This is how we become a witness to the world of God's goodness and glory. We display His greatness through our worship.

Lastly, the Psalmist ended this section with a vow: *And I will meditate on your statutes.* To meditate is to rehearse in one's head, to chew on continuously. Do you love the word of God like that? Do you return to His word, think on it, chew on it. He who does not meditate on the word of God does not treasure, or love the word of God, for he does not believe he needs it like water, or air. Your worship of God isn't displayed in how much you think you give to him, but instead in how much you think you need him. Do you need God continually? Do you need his word, his steadfast love, his salvation? If so, you meditate on his word.

Friends, this is why gathering as a church is so important. We will be taking steps to gather in these next few months. It may be that the world around us speaks ill of us, shames us for gathering, even taunts us. We gather because we know we need the word of the Lord, and we need his church body.

How do you respond to the taunting of the world?

I want to encourage you with this: we have all responded out of fear. We have all believed the false lie that our identity, our value and purpose, was wrapped up in our own personal accomplishments, talent, beauty, self-esteem and self-image. I want you to see how fragile your identity is if it is based upon yours and other's perception of you. That is not a Christian identity. The identity based on other's perception is often the very source of the one who is taunting you: they do so from an insecure place, and therefore have a need to feel more right, more powerful, more socially acceptable, more important, or more credible than others. A gospel response is to grant mercy to them, and pray for them.

We can do so because, as Christians, we have an identity that is immovable and impenetrable in Jesus Christ. Our significance and purpose has been wrapped up in the steadfast love of Christ, and is secure in his salvation. Therefore, all trials we experience serve to strengthen our faith, and show Christ to the world! How do we face trial? How do we face being mocked, taunted, for our faith? We continue to show the love and grace of God in whom we have placed our faith. It is our answer to those who taunt us: that we respond from faith, believe in His mercy which is displayed in our lives, revealed in our speech, and displayed in our worship. This is a love, a security, an identity the world does not know, and desperately needs. And when we are taunted, it is our opportunity to display the beauty of the glory of God whom we serve, and invite them to know the love and grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. May we do so, and may their hearts be turned to Christ our Lord.

¹ <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-kids-catechism/#three>

² https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-does-it-really-mean-_2_b_6890136