

August 18, 2019

The Apologetics of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:41-48

What is experimental Christianity?

In this series on experimental Christianity, we have concerned with one main question: what is a Christian? There are many ways that one could answer that question. How would you answer it? Our proclivity tends to be to reduce our Christianity to believing in a propositional truth claim: a Christian is someone who believes in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. Of course a Christian must believe that. But the essence of Christianity cannot be limited to that. The demons believe more true things about Jesus than any Christian and they shudder because of what they know (**James 2:19**).

Nor is being a Christian limited to doing outwardly Christian things. On the Great Day of Judgment, there will be many who did many things in the name of Christ. Jesus says “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy *in your name*, and cast out demons *in your name*, and do many mighty works *in your name*? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (**Matthew 7:22-23**)

No the essence of Christianity is not *mere* propositional truth, nor is it *mere* activity. The essence of Christianity, as Lloyd-Jones said is “a life that is lived with *Him*, in the consciousness of *His presence*.”¹ Christianity is worthless if it is not that. Paul said “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (**Phil. 3:8**).

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Living Water: Studies in John 4*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2009), pg. 589

Or as Jesus Himself said it in John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life is *knowing* God intimately. That’s the essence of what a Christian is. That the ultimate aim of the Scripture-reading, of church-attending, of song-singing, of sacrificial-giving, of missionary-sending—everything in the Christian life is aimed at this one thing: “that I may gain Christ and be found in him.”

Experimental Apologetics

In our passage this morning, what we are going to see is that our apologetics—our defense of the faith—are worthless and powerless if they are not born out of a life lived *with Christ*. How will you defend your faith in this increasingly hostile world? How do you speak with your unbelieving family members about Jesus? How will you give an answer to your kind pagan neighbor who is going through a crisis? What will you say when your boss asks you to lie to help the company? Boys and girls, how will you respond when your friends are mocking you for following Jesus? How will you speak and act when Christianity becomes illegal in America?

You see the Psalmist has a definite and continuous flow of thought. He's already told us that the Christian life is a life of exile. We saw that in **v.17-24**. In other words, you are an outsider. You don't belong to the world system. You've been called out of darkness into His marvelous light (**1 Peter 2:9**). And because of that, you look different, you speak different, you act different. I remember going to Zambia in 2007 and these beautiful little black children stared at me, because I looked so different, dressed so different, acted so different than what they had ever experienced. That's how the unbelieving world experiences the Christian. Not because Christians look physically different than they, but because Christians are metaphysically different—we have been born from above. What the Psalmist is going to show us this morning, is that the world demands a reckoning for this. They demand an answer.² Therefore the question is this: how will you answer? From where will you draw your strength? Where will you find your courage? That is where the Psalmist is going this morning. This is *The Apologetics of an Experimental Christian*.

² **1 Peter 4:4** says that “they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.”

The Big Idea...

The world will demand a reckoning for your Christianity, and your answer can only come from a life that is lived with Christ, on Christ, and for the glory of Christ

- ☆ What Is the Purpose of Apologetics?
- ☆ How Do We Practice Apologetics?
- ☆ Where Is Our Power in Apologetics?

I. What Is the Purpose of Apologetics?

What are apologetics?

First we need to know what apologetics are. Please turn with me to **1 Peter 3:15**. Peter says "...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a *defense* (ἀπολογία *apologia*) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." ἀπολογία *apologia* means "a reasoned statement or a verbal defense."³ ἀπολογία *apologia* is where we get the word apologetics. R.C. Sproul defined apologetics as "the reasoned defense of the Christian religion."⁴ John Frame said that apologetics is "the discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope."⁵ Cornelius Van Til defined apologetics as "the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian

³ R.C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2003), pg. 13

⁴ R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner & Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pg.13

⁵ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 1

philosophy of life.”⁶ All these definitions are helpful. Apologetics is concerned with defending the truth of Christianity.

The apologetics of the Psalmist

That is what the Psalmist is concerned with in our text in Psalm 119. We can see this in three places. First look with me at v.41-42 “Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise; *then shall I have an answer for him* who taunts me, for I trust in your word.” Why does he pray this prayer in v.41? So that he can give an answer, a defense, to the world: “...*then shall I have an answer for him* who taunts me.” Secondly look at v.43 “And take not the word of truth *utterly out of my mouth*, for my hope is in your rules.” Notice here the focus is on his mouth—the organ that speaks. His prayer is that he would continually have words to speak. Thirdly look at v.46 “I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame.” Very clear here. He is declaring that with God’s help—by His Word and Spirit—he will defend God’s truth to even the highest authorities on the planet. Hopefully you see from this, that apologetics—the defense of the faith—is the main theme that the Psalmist is concerned with in this section.

The necessity of apologetics

But then this begs the question: why are apologetics so necessary? Why does Peter command us to be able to make a defense, and why is the Psalmist so concerned with being able to give an answer to him who taunts him? There are two answers.

1. Apologetics are necessary because the whole world is in darkness

In His sermon on the mount Jesus tells all Christians everywhere “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:16). Let that statement impact you afresh: *You* are the light of the world. That statement can strengthen weak knees,

⁶ Quoted in Voddie Baucham Jr.’s *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 21

and steady fainting hearts, because it reminds us what an unbelievable and glorious thing it is to be a Christian.⁷ There is no creature in this universe more glorious than a Christian. Jesus said “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (**John 8:12**). Dear Christian not only do you possess the light of Christ, but because of your union to Christ you have been made light. That’s what Peter means when he says that we have become partakers of the Divine nature (**2 Peter 1:4**). “His nature enters in to us so that we become, in a sense, what He is Himself is.”⁸

But this implies something something very important. It implies that the rest of the world, everyone not in Jesus Christ is in a state of darkness. What does the Bible mean by darkness? It doesn’t mean physical darkness. Darkness is a spiritual condition. Isn’t it obvious that the world is in a state of spiritual darkness today? Any 24 hour period of the news ought to convince any honest person of that fact: mass shootings; sex trafficking; suicides; protests in major cities across the world; the global persecution of Christians; parents killing their own children; children under the age of 10 being taught to mutilate their own bodies so they can choose their own gender.

And this darkness is seen more acutely when you consider that it has been like this for thousands of years. The time we live in isn’t uniquely dark. It’s always been this dark. And the world sees these problems, these atrocities and says: ‘we just need more education. More education will fix these problems.’ The Bible indeed says that knowledge will increase in the last days. **Daniel 12:4** “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” Consider the explosion of knowledge that we have seen just in our own life time. I tell my children this and they can hardly believe it—that the internet was created while I was in high school. Yes knowledge has exploded. It is easier than ever to get an education. You can learn from universities online for free. But has this fixed the problem? No. The darkness remains. You see “the trouble with man is not

⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) pg. 138

⁸ *ibid*, pg. 142

in his intellect, it is in his nature.”⁹ Non-Christians are not stupid. They are slaves to the darkness. **John 3:19** “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”

That’s the first reason why apologetics are so necessary. Christians are the only light that non-Christians see. Jesus said “You are the light of the world.” In other words, “There is no one to warn the modern world except the Christian.”¹⁰

2. Apologetics are necessary because this world belongs to Jesus Christ

Please look with me at **v.46** “I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame.” Notice two things. **First**, *who* is the Psalmist speaking to? “I will also speak of your testimonies *before kings...*” He’s speaking before kings. The message of Christianity extends to the highest authorities in the world. One of the most profound things that John Calvin wrote in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is his prefatory address to Francis I, King of France. Written in 1536 this outcast reformer laid out seven apologetics of the Protestant faith against the lies of Rome. He pleaded with the king thus:

“Your duty, most serene Prince, is, not to shut either your ears or mind against a cause involving such mighty interests as these: how the glory of God is to be maintained on the earth inviolate, how the truth of God is to preserve its dignity, how the kingdom of Christ is to continue among us compact and secure. The cause is worthy of your ear, worthy of your investigation, worthy of your throne.

The characteristic of a true sovereign is, to acknowledge that, in the administration of his kingdom, he is a minister of God. He who does not

⁹ *ibid*, 146

¹⁰ *ibid*

make his reign subservient to the divine glory, acts not the part of a king, but a robber.”¹¹

What was Calvin’s apologetic to this king? ‘This is Jesus Christ’s kingdom, and ultimately not yours. And we will all one day give an account.’ That’s the first thing we see in **v.46**. The message of Christianity is absolute for everyone—including kings.¹²

Secondly, look at *what* the Psalmist is speaking about. “I will also speak of *your testimonies...*” *Your* testimonies. He’s proclaiming God’s testimonies, God’s Words, God’s declarations. He’s not proclaiming himself. Paul said “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (**2 Cor. 4:5**). We do not engage in apologetics to ourselves look good, we engage to make Jesus Christ look good as He actually is. John Stott said it like this.

“[Our highest motive]¹³ is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God...) but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ...Only one imperialism is Christian...and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire.”¹⁴

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Trans. Henry Beveridge, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), pg. xxi-xxii

¹² “...the earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (**Psalm 24:1**). As Abraham Kuyper once said “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/99035-there-is-not-a-square-inch-in-the-whole-domain> Accessed August 17, 2019

¹³ Stott applied this to missionary work, but I believe apologetics is equally included.

¹⁴ Quoted in John Piper’s *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2003), pg. 9

This must be the supreme concern in our apologetics. Before Peter tells us **1 Peter 3:15** to “...always be prepared to make a defense”—before we even engage in apologetics, he first says “...*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy...*”

Apologetics for the average Joe

This brings us to our next question: are all Christians to engage in apologetics? Yes. That’s why it’s here in Psalm 119. This will be the experience of all Christians. All Christians are to “...be prepared to make a *defense* (ἀπολογία *apologia*) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...” (**1 Peter 3:15**). Confessing Christ before men is a true mark of a Christian. To be sure, some will do this falsely with no real faith. But real faith must and will express itself. This doesn’t mean that we will do it perfectly. We will do it very imperfectly. Nonetheless, it is a necessary fruit of the new birth. Jesus said “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before me, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (**Matthew 10:32-33**).

That’s our **first point**. Let’s summarize. **First**, to engage in apologetics is to give an answer for the hope that is in you. **Second**, apologetics are necessary because the whole world is in darkness, and because this world belongs to King Jesus and He is to glorified in all things. **Third**, apologetics are for every Christian.

II. How Do We Practice Apologetics?

What about technique?

When I said that apologetics is for every Christian, I didn’t mean that every Christian must be a specialist in theology, philosophy, physics, linguistics, and logic. That would be a categorically false to say that unless you can do maneuver within those fields then you are not an apologist. There are some

Christians who are specialists in those fields and we are so thankful for them. Ok then how does the average Christian engage in defending the faith? First it's important to point out that the Psalmist is not at all concerned with technique here. He first concerned with his life and then with his lips. Let's take those one at a time.

1. We are to practice apologetics with our lives

Look with me **v.41-42** "Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise; *then* shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word." We'll look at **v.41** under our third point. For now, look at this opposition in **v.42**. The Psalmist is praying for God to help him answer the person who is taunting him. To *taunt* means to pierce with words, to insult, to rebuke. Christian this is what is Jesus promised you. **John 15:19** "...because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." Ever since the garden when God put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent,¹⁵ there will always be a taunting that comes from the world to the Christian.

But notice here, this taunting comes before the Psalmist has even given an answer. He says "then shall I have an answer of him who taunts me." Do you see? He hasn't even answered his opposition yet. He's just living his life. And that is enough to earn him these insults. Why? Well because the Christian lives his life differently than the world. Look at **v.44-45** "I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts." What does this mean? Well the best NT equivalent is **John 8:31-32**, Jesus said "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Abiding in Christ's Word is what the Psalmist means by "I will keep your law continually, forever and ever" in **v.44**. The Psalmist is not talking about sinless perfection. We already saw his confession of sin in **v.25-32**. He's telling us that Christians have a new Master. No longer are they under the dominion of sin and death. The law

¹⁵ Genesis 3:15

of God is now the law of liberty. That's why he says in v.45 "and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts." A *wide place* meaning a free place. His heart is has been set free to obey and love God, or as Jesus said it "and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

You are the salt of the earth

The question is, why does this bring taunting from the world? That's what v.42 is concerned with. What does righteousness bring rebuke from the world? We know it does, **1 Peter 4:9** says "With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you." Why? Perhaps the best explanation comes from another saying of Jesus from the sermon on the mount. Again Jesus tells all Christians everywhere: "You are the salt of the earth..." (**Matthew 5:13**). This is just as astounding as saying that we are the light of the world. We, and only we—that is, only Christians is what Jesus means—are the salt of the earth. What does this imply? It implies that this whole world system is rotting away, it's polluting itself, it's becoming foul and offensive.¹⁶ That's what Jesus meant by calling us salt. As salt, our function is not to provide health per se, it's to prevent putrefaction.¹⁷ Salt is rubbed into a wound to prevent infection. Salt is rubbed into meat to prevent it from rotting. Jesus' meaning here is almost purely negative. Christians prevent the world from rotting away. Just consider an easy illustration. Haven't you ever been in the company of non-believers before and they start swearing and speaking of rotten and degrading things, but then they discover you're a Christian. Often times they will stop swearing in your presence, or at least apologize for it. Why? Because you are salt. You have the effect of preventing putrefaction. As Lloyd-Jones says here "Wherever I find myself, immediately that 'something different' about me should have it's effect; and that in turn ought to lead men and women to look at me and say, 'There is

¹⁶ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) pg. 131

¹⁷ *ibid*, pg. 133

something unusual about that man.’¹⁸ But ultimately this will anger the world. When you do not join them in their decay, they will feel true conviction and shame, and they will turn to taunting you and maligning you.

So ask yourself, do you have this effect on the people around you? Are you ever taunted and reviled because you are following Christ? I promise that if you live your life as a living sacrifice to Christ, loving Him, loving the church, and loving the lost, you will be taunted. But if you are not being taunted at all by the life that you are living, you must ask yourself “Am I really a Christian?” The Psalmist is showing us that this is an inevitable effect of following Christ. So that is the first way we are to practice our apologetics: with the lives that we live.

2. We are to practice apologetics with our lips

The Psalmist is not content with merely living out his faith, he is praying to be able to answer this taunting with words. Please look at **v.43** “And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules.” We need God to give us words, so that we can give a reason for the life we are living. Now I must say here, that I know that I sounded very imperialistic under our first heading. I even used that word. Remember Stott’s quote: “Only one imperialism is Christian...and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire.”¹⁹ Many Christians including myself have shamefully engaged in apologetics in a rude manner. Christ’s Lordship over all things is not a license to mistreat non-Christians. That’s why the second part of **1 Peter 3:15** is so vital to remember here: “...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; *yet do it with gentleness and respect.*” The manner in which we speak is just as important as what we speak. I’m not talking about the mindless politically correct niceness that is so prevalent in our culture. Of course engaging in

¹⁸ *ibid*, pg. 143

¹⁹ Quoted in John Piper’s *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2003), pg. 9

apologetics is not always a calm and peaceful enterprise. It wasn't for Jesus. He "had several rather heated exchanges in his day."²⁰ But even in Jesus' most heated exchanges, He never treated the people in front of Him as sub-human. Some of His exchanges were heated *precisely* because He treated His opponents as human being made in the image of God who were rushing head first into destruction.

Peter and the slave girl

So to return to our point, we need words to speak. But the Psalmist isn't focused on some sort of verbal jujitsu. His focus here is not to give us specific words to speak. Neither does Peter in his most famous passage on apologetics. The Psalmist focus is on asking God to give Him the words. That's what the Psalmist is praying for in v.43 "And take not the truth utterly out of my mouth." He's saying it negatively, put positively it would be "God put your words of truth in my mouth. Dear congregation, Biblical apologetics are supernatural. Calvin says "[here] we may learn, that the faculty of speaking freely is no more in our power than are the affections of our heart."²¹ Just look at the Biblical record, whenever a Christian was without the Spirit wrought power, he utterly fails in his defense of the faith. Remember Peter? He told Jesus "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." (**Matthew 26:33**). His whole emphasis was on his strength versus everyone else's weakness, his ability versus everyone else's inability, his bravery versus everyone else's cowardice. He didn't have a lick of humility in him. He didn't need the Holy Spirit in his defense of Christ, he could do it on his own. But what happened? A slave girl happened. The weakest human being in that society walked up to him and said "You also were with Jesus the Galilean" (**Matthew 26:69**). And he absolutely fell apart. He had no defense. He had no apologetic. He only had denials and

²⁰ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 38-39

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For a look at Jesus' heated encounters cf. Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33, 37; Luke 3:7

²¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. VI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 433

cursings. I'm not saying this to pick on Peter. This is a picture of all of us. We tend to rely on the wrong things in our defense of the gospel.

Isn't it fascinating that the Psalmist is not pointing to a specific technique or a specialized argument to utilize in our apologetics? No. That's not ultimately what wins the day. Voddie Baucham points out that "It is though we believe that if we just make the right argument, refute the right falsehood, and set forth the right set of facts, then people will bow the knee and surrender to Christ."²² As Reformed people we confess that we cannot by *mere* argument persuade people to bow the knee and surrender to Christ. But have we bowed the knee and surrendered to Christ in how we do apologetics? Meaning are we dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God for the very words that we speak? Can't you hear the desperateness of the Psalmist in **v.41** and **v.43**? It's almost as if he's saying 'Lord I am aware of my Peter-like spirit. I know that I can't even open my mouth to a slave girl if I'm left to myself. Please come over me, open my mouth, give me words, let me speak for you.' This is the most vital lesson to learn in our apologetics. We could teach apologetics classes all day long. You could read 100 books on apologetics. But if you are not prayerfully dependent upon the Spirit of God in your apologetics, you will not have an answer that honors Christ in your witness.

That's our **second point**. Our first weapon in our apologetic arsenal is the lives that we live. Our second weapon in our apologetic arsenal is Spirit-wrought words—words that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts as we commune with Him in prayer.

²² Voddie Baucham Jr., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 43

III. Where Is Our Power in Apologetics?

The Gospel is the power of God

Why is it often so difficult to give a defense when we are taunted by the world? I would argue that this is one of the most difficult things that we called to do as Christians. It is certainly one of the most scary things that we are called to do. Why? Voddie Baucham says that “Ultimately it is fear of man. We hold men and their approval...in higher regard than we do the Lord, the Messiah, Jesus.”²³ Certainly the Psalmist experienced this fear. You can hear it in his prayer. So then what is his solution to overcoming this fear? Where does he look for help? How does he recover his boldness?

Let’s look carefully now at **v.41**. He prays “Let your steadfast love²⁴ come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise;” THEN he says “shall I have an answer...” So what is he praying for here that gives him the *power* that he needs? Isn’t it clear? He’s praying to experience the gospel afresh. His power comes from the gospel.²⁵ Dear saint, you must understand this about the gospel—it is the power of God unto salvation. That doesn’t mean *merely* that the gospel is the power of God for our initial salvation. Not it is the power of God from the very moment we first believed unto the day of eternity. It is the power

²³ *ibid*, pg. 44

²⁴ This phrase “steadfast love” arguably comes from the most important Hebrew word in the OT with the only exception being of the name of God Himself. Steadfast love is the word *hesed*. It is richer and deeper than any English word for love because it is conceived in an eternal covenant by God Himself. *Hesed* is that love that endures and persists beyond any sin, beyond any betrayal. (Source: http://ourrabbijesus.com/articles/hesed_love_long_term/ Accessed August 17, 2019). It is perhaps the chief way that God describes Himself in the OT. When Moses was in the cleft of the rock, God passed by him and proclaimed “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness” (**Exodus 34:6**) Every other book in the OT looks back on that phrase and you hear it’s echo in their pages. **Psalm 103:17** “...the steadfast love (*hesed*) of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.” **Lamentations 3:31-32** “The Lord will not cast off forever...though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love (*hesed*)”

²⁵ Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

of our whole lives. That is why Paul said in **1 Corinthians 1:18** “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Did you hear it? To us who are being saved, to us who are already Christians, it is the power of God. That’s what the Psalmist is praying to receive! He’s praying that God would remind him of his salvation.

But here’s the vital component. He’s not simply asking that God would remind him of the facts of the gospel, he’s asking for an inward experience of those facts in his heart. “There is a difference between *thinking* honey is sweet and *tasting* that honey is sweet.”²⁶ Dear saint this is *why* defending the faith in a hostile world is so difficult. It’s not because primarily because we may face persecution or affliction. It’s difficult because we are constantly forgetting what the gospel tastes like.²⁷

Oh taste and see!

So may God grant us His grace as we taste the gospel afresh together. **First** of all, we must insist that the gospel is not an abstract thing. The gospel is essentially a Person: the LORD Jesus Christ. This Jesus is not a created being. He is not a jr. God, not a lesser version of God the Father. He is both the Son of God, and God Himself. He was begotten not made, very of very God, united with true man in one Person forever. Think of that! The Father did not send down an angel to save us. That would have been great indeed—to send one of His mighty ministers whom He calls “a flame of fire” (**Hebrews 1:7**) whose strength exceeds all the strength of men. But no the Father gave us His Beloved Son— “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (**Matthew 3:17**).

There is no greater gift that the Father could have given. Jesus is a greater gift than all worlds combined. He is the One for whom all worlds were made “visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (**Colossians 1:16**).

²⁶ J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 66-67

²⁷ cf. Matthew 6:22

There is no greater love that the Father could have shown. In giving His Son, He was giving His own express image, the radiance of His glory (**Hebrews 1:3**). In giving us His Son, He was giving us Himself—whole God of whole God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son” (**John 3:16**). In giving us His Son, He gave us all other things, not one good thing has He withheld “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (**Romans 8:32**). What greater gift, what greater love could God have shown us? What more could He possibly bestow upon since in giving us His Son, He has given us Himself?

Secondly, we must insist on what this Son of God—Jesus actually accomplished for us. Different theories of the atonement have gutted the cross of Christ of it’s infinite terror and it’s infinite tenderness. One such theory, the Moral Influence Theory that says as we look at the cross we see the greatness of Divine love. If follow this example of great love—this love that lays down it’s life for other people—we are saved as we become better. This is essentially the gospel of world. As we improve our lives by surrounding ourselves with positivity, we will certainly be saved in the next life whatever that looks like. Dear congregation there is no power in that message because it is 100% false. If all Jesus did was provide us an example of love, His death was senseless. One author illustrated this senselessness: “If I were in a rushing river and someone jumped in to save me, but in the process of saving me this person lost his life, then I could recognize the love and sacrifice involved. But I were was sitting safely on the land and someone jumped into the torrent to show me his love, I could see no point in this senseless act. Unless the death of Christ really accomplishes something, it is not in fact a demonstration of love.”²⁸

So then what did Christ’s death accomplish? Everything. When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, He satisfied all the wrath—the complete and final wrath—of God against your sin. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1

²⁸ Source: <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/atonementmorris2.html>
 Accessed August 18, 2019

John 4:10). Jesus made satisfaction for your sins. Beloved, a holy God cannot be satisfied with the life that you have lived. Your life has been a failure, in fact a series of failures, one after another. One sin after another, day after day, year after year. Your sins are an infinite mountain of debt, each filled with reasons for God to condemn you to hell forever. You've never given God one reason to save you. But God gave God a reason to save you. And that reason is Jesus Christ. And now instead of a mountain of debt you have a mountain of mercies.

You have the mercy of knowing that your salvation was the eternal plan of God. God always planned on giving you His Son. He was the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world (**Rev. 13:8**).

You have the mercy of knowing that your life was spared and protected until you came to saving faith. **Ephesians 1:5** "In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ..."

You have the mercy of being effectually called to life. **Romans 8:30** "And those whom he predestined he also called."

You have the mercy of possessing imputed righteousness—the very righteousness of Christ. **2 Corinthians 5:21** "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

You have the mercy of knowing that you will never come under condemnation. **Romans 8:1** "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

You have the mercy of knowing that every misery in this life will work out for your good. **Romans 8:28** "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

You have the mercy of knowing that one day God will wipe every every tear from your eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things will have passed away (**Revelation 21:4**).

You have the mercy of knowing that when Christ returns, whether you are raised from the dead, or you ascend to meet Him in the air, you will always be with the Lord (**2 Thess. 4:16-17**).

Beloved those are your mercies. Can you taste them? That is where our power comes to defend the faith—from the gospel, it is the power of God. That is what the Psalmist prays for in **v.41**. Not that he would merely think about what Christ has done, but that He would taste it.

That's our **third point**. Our power to defend the faith, comes from asking God to help us to inwardly taste the mercies of Jesus Christ in the gospel afresh.

Application

1. What kind of a Word has God given us?

God has given us a word to empower our apologetics. In our passage the reason why the Psalmist can defend the faith before kings is because he loves God's word. He specifically says "I will also speak of your testimonies before kings...*for* I find my delight in your commandments which I love." And then he makes this vital connection between love and meditation. Look at **v.48** "I will lift up my hands towards your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes." What is meditation? It isn't mere reading. It's mental chewing. You don't just put food into your mouth and swallow it, you would choke. I think that's why so many of us choke on the word, because we are not chewing on it, we're not digesting it, and ruminating on it. In one sense that's what preaching is. We came here this morning to meditate—through the act of preaching—on 8 verses. What is the result? Hopefully you've been empowered

to defend the faith. That's what meditation on the Word does. God has given us a word, to meditate on, so that we can speak his testimonies before kings.

2. What kind of a world do we live in?

We living in a world where Christians are shamed for their faith in Jesus Christ. The world sees the word of the cross as foolishness. Perhaps you're here this morning and you are one who shames Christians for their faith. You must remember that a day is coming when you will be put to shame. When you will stand before the Judge of the Universe and the tables will be turned. Then it will be too late. You will be condemned. Don't wait another second. Jesus Christ was sent into the world for sinners like you. God says in His Word that "...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame" (**Romans 10:9, 11**).

3. What kind of a church should we want?

We should want a witnessing church—a church that outwardly, publicly, lovingly, truthfully proclaims Jesus Christ. Dear congregation, we are living with people everyday, in our places of work, in our family gatherings, in public, who are all in a state of darkness. They don't have any light. The only light that they have is the light from Christians—"You are the light of the world." "Do they see something different about us? Are our lives a silent rebuke to them?"²⁹ Are we giving them a reason for the hope that is within us? Christians alone have an answer for sickness that is facing the world today. Are you giving away that answer?

²⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) pg. 147

4. What kind of Savior do we need?³⁰

We need a Savior who will continue to show Himself to us. That's what the Psalmist is promising this morning. When we call upon Him "let your steadfast love come to Me, O Lord," and when we meditate upon His Word, God will visit us with His mercies anew. The Christian life is not a life in which we only experience the mercy of Jesus once at the beginning and then we are left to ourselves. No. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (**Lamentations 3:22-23**).

³⁰ With the exception of the first question, the last three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23