

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Psalm 119 - The importance of God's Word: Nun - Psalm 119:105-112

Good morning, and isn't it good that the lighter mornings and longer days are coming again. Life just seems so much nicer when it is light. Light is very much the theme of today's portion of Psalm 119, but before we look at the verses, Psalm 119:105-112, it would be useful just to set a little of the context. You may remember just a few months ago reading the verses from Isaiah 9, particularly Isaiah 9:2: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined."* Here we have the wonderful promise of the coming Messiah. Part of His mission was to reveal God to us - He would be the very embodiment of all that God is. But He was to come to a people who were walking in darkness. That is striking in that the nation of Israel were the most religious nation on earth and without doubt their moral code was of a far higher order than the nations around about them.

Sadly, when we come to the fulfilment of this verse in John's Gospel we read in John 1:5: *"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"* and in John 1:11: *"He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him."* As the light of God shone in this world, it was utterly rejected by the nation of Israel. They did not realise that as they saw the Lord going about, doing good (see Acts 10:38), that they were watching God Himself at work in His creation. They completely misunderstood what the work of God entailed. So in John 3:19, we read: *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."*

Mankind does not want the light of God to shine in this world for it reveals just how far they are from pleasing God. Like a beetle scurrying for cover when a rock is turned, so mankind would rather stay in the dark for shame of their deeds being revealed. Hardly a flattering summary of the glory of mankind but one that is necessary if we are going to do anything useful to improve the situation. So the question before us, then, is how can we in our day, or the psalmist writing maybe in about 1,000 BC, move out of the darkness and live a life that is pleasing to God? Is it possible for us to know what God wants for our lives?

Let us then read together Psalm 119:105-112. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments. I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word. Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments. My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts. Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end."*

I remember as a young man enjoying the words of a song by Amy Grant based upon this part of His word. They are worth repeating:

*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
When I feel afraid,
Think I've lost my way,
Still You're there right beside me.
And nothing will I fear
As long as You are near.
Please be near me to the end.*

*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
I will not forget
Your love for me and yet
My heart forever is wandering.
Jesus be my guide,
And hold me to Your side,
I will love You to the end.*

Amy Grant/Michael W Smith © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc, Capitol Christian Music Group

What a wonderful sense of security these words convey, based upon the rock solid foundation of God's word acting upon the life of an individual. Through good times and bad His word is what we need to live a victorious Christian life.

The first verse of our part of the psalm, Psalm 119:105, is possibly the most well known part of this psalm. We need to remind ourselves that psalms are Hebrew poetry. They are not direct teaching where every word has specific meaning. Unlike English poetry, which certainly used to use rhyme and metre as a way of being memorable and conveying its thought, Hebrew poetry uses repetition of thought. Sometimes this repetition of thought would use a strong contrast between two opposites. At other times, the psalmist would repeat the same thought just using different words. Sometimes the repetition would add a further thought to enhance the first thought.

So in Psalm 119:105 we find that *"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."* For the psalmist, this word would have been the Pentateuch, the first five books in our Old Testament. For us we have the full revealed word of God, complete and in our own language in our Bible. This is a blessing of the highest order. Imagine if you were to go to church later this morning, and it was read to you in Hebrew and Greek, with no-one to translate! Imagine if there was no Bible at all! For many in this world they do not need to imagine this - it is a sad reality.

Today, we have the full word of God which tells us who God is and what He has done. It shows us how God would have us behave. Much has been said about the difference between a lamp and a light. Some would see in this the difference between near and distant illumination. His word will show us how to behave in a particular situation as a lamp illuminates the area immediately around a person. It will also show us how we ought to plan our lives and the kinds of priorities we should have as we will make life changing decisions in the way that the sunlight illuminates the whole country, not just my locality.

Others would see in Psalm 119:105 a promise that His word will be a guide for us night and day. During the night we might light a lamp to help us see but during the day we throw open the curtains and let the sunlight in. His word is good for us day and night and it is an excellent habit to get into reading His word in the morning and in the evening. Of course, we all lead different lives and what suits one will not suit another. However, if we can make time every day to read and think about His word then we will be much helped in life.

Others would suggest that the lamp shows us where we are and the light shows us where we need to go. In that respect, His word not only exposes the failures and problems in our life but also shows us what we need to do about them.

Undoubtedly, all these three things are true of the word of God, although they may not necessarily have been in the mind of the psalmist as he wrote these words. In a day when we hear so much about relative truth and self perception, it is good to know that God has given us absolute truth and has not only revealed to us all we need to know about Him, but also all we need to know in order to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

The psalmist then says that *"I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments"* (Psalm 119:106). It is so important to be settled in our minds of the course that our lives will take. We cannot know every circumstance that we will pass through. Very often we may feel like we are responding to events rather than deciding upon our own path. For sure, there will be times in life that we feel spiritually close to God. At other times we may feel spiritually down and quite distant from God. However, through thick and thin, we need to have made that conscious decision that at all times His word will be the final authority in our lives and that it will be the principle voice that guides our every decision.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he told them in Romans 12:1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."* This is a once and for all thing that we do. I think it matches the sentiment of the psalmist exactly, when he said that he had sworn to keep His righteous judgments. I wonder, as you listen to this programme today, have you consciously made the decision that Christ, through His word, will rule in your life in everything, now and for the rest of your life. It is the best kind of life. But then Paul tells his readers in Romans 12:2: *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

I think this has more to do with the many every day decisions we make:

- I am not going to get angry when I am stuck in the traffic jam;
- I am not going to share that juicy gossip;
- I am going to make time to speak to my neighbour.

The life of the committed Christian ought to be radically different from that of the unbeliever and for the better (Psalm 119:106). I think the psalmist had this in mind when he spoke about confirming that he would keep His righteous judgments. We show the truth of His word by living it out!

But in case we think that living a life in obedience to His word will mean that everything goes well and is a path to ease and comfort, our next verse show us that the opposite is true. *"I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word"* (Psalm 119:107). Jesus promised His disciples in John 15:20: *"Remember the word that I spoke to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."* There can be no doubt that this world rejected Him, and still does by and large. We cannot expect anything less, particularly when we live out the truth of His word. It will not be a popular lifestyle. However, it will be one that may attract some to faith and we can be sure that, amidst the suffering, He will be present. The psalmist could elsewhere say, *"He restores my soul"* (Psalm 23:3). God knows our frame and will not push us beyond what we are able to endure for Him.

Psalm 119:108 shows us the positive experience a life of obedience to His word brings. Yes there may be times of persecution and suffering but there will also be times of positively enjoying Christ. *"Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments"* (Psalm 119:108). The writer to the Hebrews could say: *"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name"* (Hebrews 13:5). I still remember our children's head teacher praising her children after a concert. Personally, I thought the music hadn't been that good and the singing even worse. But she really was encouraging them. When we praise God there is no chance that we will be saying anything that is more than God deserves. It is simply not possible to praise Him too much. The strange thing is, though, that when we do praise Him, we so often feel so much the better for it. I can recall frequently going to a Bible study on a Friday evening, sometimes straight from work. At the end of the week I was exhausted. However, after two hours of study and then fellowship and singing I felt like I could climb Everest! Praise is not only right for Him but it is good for us.

Neither was the psalmist happy with what he already knew and so he prays, *"teach me Your judgments"* (Psalm 119:108), literally, keep on teaching me Your judgments. No matter whether we are a young Christian or one who has been saved for many decades, we do so need to keep a spirit within us that longs to keep on growing. We should never be satisfied with what we already know but long to know more. This is not so that we can impress others with our vast knowledge but so that we can help them and understand the glories of our great God better.

Our next verse shows us that the Spirit filled life is anything but dull and routine. *"My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law"* (Psalm 119:109). Twice already the phrase *"my life is in my hands"* has been written. It was true of David, as he faced the giant (1 Samuel 19:5) and it was true of Job (Job 13:14-15). His word will help us to rightly value our lives. For the unbeliever, this life is all there is. No wonder they want to fill it with self pleasing. After all, they think that when it is gone it is gone. Those of us who know that this is not true, but have come to know the greatness of our God, know that this life is not all there is. There are things more important than life itself. So we can take our lives in our hands without fear because we know that they are held by Him who is far greater than ourselves. This does not mean we are reckless and foolhardy. It simply means that we know that He has control of our lives and they only have worth when lived in obedience to Him. He may call us to quiet and peaceful normality. Or he may call us to real danger. Either way, we ought to be ready, like Aquila and Priscilla to *"lay down our necks"* (see Romans 16:4) for the Gospel.

In our next verse we are again reminded of the danger that we will face in life. *"The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts"* (Psalm 119:110). Earlier in this psalm, in Psalm 119:85, we have already seen that *"The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to Your law."* Temptation comes in all forms and sizes, and we can be sure that when we resolve to follow the life of obedience to His word, then the devil will soon find ways to cause trouble. Wherever God is at work, the devil will be doing his worst in the vain attempt to frustrate the plans of God. I think the kind of snare the psalmist had in mind was one that would entangle his footsteps and bring him down. No wonder he needed the light of God's word for his every step. His word is well able to speak to us in every situation in which we find ourselves. Sometimes we may need to dig a little. At other times we may need to wait and allow the Holy Spirit to apply His word in just the right way. We can be sure, though, that in Christ we have sufficient resource to be able to stand firm in every circumstance. We have His word. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have the fellowship of His people. We do not lack for resources, but we ought to challenge ourselves as to what extent we make use of them. A soldier engaged in active service needs to ensure he is fully armed and his equipment is in working order. We cannot be surprised if we do not know how to respond in a godly way in a particular circumstance if we have neglected the study of His word. For those who are ready and willing, Paul would say, in 1 Corinthians 15:58: *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* No attack of the devil, no cunning attempt to compromise the saint of God by an unbeliever can be successful against the believer who is obediently depending upon God.

"Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart" (Psalm 119:111). Perhaps you have been to a stately house. On display is some furniture or a painting that has been handed down from one

generation to the next. It has been in the family for centuries. Sometimes, when I see such things I think they are really horrible - they may be worth a lot, but I would never have them in my home! Sometimes it is good to throw away old things and get new. However, when we consider His word this should not be the case. What the psalmist had learned of God's word he would treasure forever. Perhaps you can look back on the times in your past when you heard the truth of the Bible being taught. Are His promises as precious today as they were then? There is a movement within the church today to dilute what His word has to say so that it is more palatable to those who are not saved. We want to make our Christianity fit in with the current culture, forgetting that what is considered suitable today, will be considered wrong in a future generation. This is not right. What we read in His word has stood the test of time because it is true. It is true because it comes from the One who is the truth! He does not lie (Titus 1:2) and He will not change (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8). Nor should we! We can and should embrace change where all that is at stake is our personal preference, our comfort zone. But when it comes to His word, let us value our Christian heritage and the plain truth of His word.

Finally, we come to the last verse: *"I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end"* (Psalm 119:112). The word for *"end"* has at its heart the idea of reward. So the psalmist could be saying that with the end in view, with the reward in view, he would keep going and not give up. How sad, if having completed 22 miles of the marathon race, the athlete was to give up on the home straight! Alternatively, the psalmist might be saying that keeping His word was an end in itself. The blessing that comes from obedience to His word is reward enough. Both are true and should be just the kind of encouragement we need to live faithfully for Him, so long as He leaves us here. May we always live for Him with the light of His word shining upon our pathway and thus bring glory to Him.

Thank you for listening to this *Truth for Today* talk on Psalm 119:105-112, the importance of God's word, talk number T1092

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