

## **Psalm 119 - The importance of God's Word Verses 121-128, Ayin**

Today we return to Psalm 119. The last talk we had on this subject on Truth for Today was in May, when Gordon Kell considered verses 113-120. Gordon reminded us that the Psalm has an alphabetical arrangement, with each section of eight verses starting with a particular letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Today's section, verses 121-128, all begin with the Hebrew letter "Ayin." If you look this letter up on the internet, it apparently has the meaning of eye, as in the eyes with which we see.

When we first started our series on Psalm 119, back in September 2017, I noted that the whole of this lengthy psalm has one main theme, which is the excellency and the value of the Word of God. As I said then, in our first talk, this psalm is full of verses explaining the benefit of God's Word, expressing a desire to keep it, asking for help to live according to it, and so on. We considered the fact that we come across a number of different words in this psalm that stand for God's Word, words such as "law, testimony, ways, precept, statute," and so on. As I explained, some expositors think that these words all have different shades of meaning, and that they might therefore bring out one or other particular aspect of the Word of God.

Looking at Psalm 119 in this way, that is to say, as a sort of celebration of God's Word, gives us a clue to interpreting our section today, verses 121-128. I'll read that section for you now, using the New King James version:

"I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors.  
Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let the proud oppress me.  
My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word  
Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes.  
I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies.  
It is time for You to act, O LORD, for they have regarded Your law as void.  
Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!  
Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right;  
I hate every false way."

Interestingly, the first two verses in this section, particularly verse 122, appear to be some of the very few verses of Psalm 119 that do not directly mention the Word of God in some form or other. However, I think that they do refer to it, or at least allude to it, and that by considering Psalm 119 as a celebration of God's Word, we can get an understanding of this otherwise seemingly difficult-to-apply section.

The psalmist starts off by saying, "I have done justice and righteousness". Where would he have found the instructions and directions for doing justice and righteousness? What are justice and righteousness, in any case? Are they just the general opinion of the times that we happen to live in? The psalmist would have found his instructions for justice and righteousness in the Word of God. A great importance was placed on knowing and doing according to the Word of God in the

Old Testament. For example, Joshua was told, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua chapter 1 verse 8). Joshua, you remember, had a great task in front of him. He was the next leader of the people of Israel after Moses. He had to lead that whole nation. God told him that by meditating and following His Word, then Joshua would be successful in the task that had been given to him.

The same spirit governs the requirements for Israel's king. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, verses 18-20, instructions were given for when Israel would later have a king. The king was to do according to these following verses:

"Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

The king was to copy out God's word, and to read it daily, so that he could be successful as a king, and be a blessing to his people. You can see that if you had to write out the Word for yourself, and then read it every day, how it would become well grafted as a part of your life.

In summary, what we can see from these verses that I quoted, from Joshua and from Deuteronomy, is that the Word of God was to be the rule of life. No doubt therefore the psalmist here in Psalm 119 had also been studying the Word of God, so that he could say, "I have done justice and righteousness." But the Word that he had been studying wasn't just a dead book, a dry set of archaic precepts and commands. It was the Word of the Living God. That is why, having followed God's Word, he was then able to ask the Author of the Word to protect him: "Do not leave me to my oppressors." Furthermore, he was counting on the Author of the Word to make good His promises and to come in for him, to answer for him, to take up his cause: "Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let the proud oppress me."

This dynamic interaction between the Word itself and the Author of the Word is most interesting. It shows us someone who is reading and studying God's Word, and then asking God to act according to it, in other words, he is praying back God's Word to God! It is not so much simple reading but rather a kind of conversation, and it has an application for us in New Testament times. For instance, we put our trust in God's Word, because we recognise that it is evidently a revelation from God. As such, it reveals God to us, and we then find by experience that what it says about God is indeed true. This then helps us to put our faith in God's word for important, fundamental matters where we must trust what He says to us, because no other source can enlighten us, such as what happens to us after death, and how we can be sure of our eternal destiny. But also in the small details of life, we can have a conversation with God as we see how the Word of God applies to our circumstances, and we can ask God to act according to what He has revealed and promised in His Word.

The psalmist wanted God to be a surety for him for good - in other words, for God to fully take up his case, and to vindicate him before his enemies. A surety is a guarantee, or pledge, or security, or since we are talking about a personal God, He is the guarantor. I suppose that the psalmist wanted God to deliver him from the proud boasts and accusations of his oppressors, whoever they were. In a much greater sense, we trust that the Lord Jesus is indeed our Surety for all that concerns our forgiveness, redemption and blessing. Thankfully, this is actually true, because in

Hebrews chapter 7, verse 22, we are told that “Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.” There we have it, in black and white, that He is our Surety, our guarantor. Whatever we lacked, He supplied. He took our sin upon Himself, and we had His righteousness imputed to us, as we can read and understand when we go through the epistle to the Romans. Knowing that He is our Surety, we can trust Him for the future, and particularly for His promises regarding our ultimate destiny. If we know that the Word of God is true and reliable, then we can happily trust in such words of the Lord Jesus as these: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John chapter 5, verse 24). If we didn’t know the Person who had said such things, it would seem rash to stake our eternal destiny and our present manner of life on such a statement, but we do know Him, and we can be sure that what He says is true.

This dynamic interaction between the Word and its Author continues in verses 123 - 124. Here we read that the psalmist’s eyes fail for seeking God’s salvation and God’s righteous Word. What I think that means is, that he wants to see the salvation, or deliverance, from his problem in God’s Word, and he wants to see that salvation in practice. He understands that, even if he can say, “I have done justice and righteousness,” nevertheless he still needs God’s mercy, and he needs God to keep on teaching him, hence he continues, “Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes.”

We express a similar sentiment in our New Testament times. Like the psalmist, we continually depend upon God’s grace. In his book ‘We Would see Jesus,’ Roy Hession explains that Paul’s epistles are full of the phrase ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord,’ and that so often Paul does not mention blessings without immediately adding, ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ It is certainly true that all of our blessings, both current and future, are according to God’s grace. No doubt this is why, in his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul told him, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 1). Indeed, the very last verse of the Bible says, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Revelation chapter 22 verse 21). We need God’s grace, just as the psalmist realised that he needed God’s mercy.

We also need to be taught, just as the psalmist requested: ‘Teach me Your statutes.’ Turning once again to Paul’s second letter to Timothy, we read in chapter 2 verse 7, “Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” This need for understanding is a very important aspect of the dynamic interaction between us, God’s Word and God Himself, as I will explain now.

In the final four verses of our section today, we read that the psalmist is asking for help to cling to God’s Word in a time when it is generally disregarded. He starts off by requesting understanding in verse 125: “I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies.” Largely speaking, the Bible is not a particularly difficult book to read. Faithful, easy-to-read translations are available. It is true that there are some sections, for example in the prophets, that are not necessarily simple to interpret, but as I say, on the whole the actual message of the Bible is pretty simple. It is not like some poetry classes that I still remember from school, when I couldn’t make much sense of the text! However, without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the Bible will remain a dead book to us. In 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 13-14, Paul says: “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The actual text of the Bible is simple enough, as I said, but for it to really mean something for us, for it to transform us, we need the understanding of the Holy Spirit. Now this is not a mystical or esoteric thing that we somehow need to attain to by our own efforts, but rather it is simply allowing the Word of God to speak to our conscience. The Holy Spirit is more than willing to make good His message to us, if we will let Him. That is why the apostle says three times in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” God wants us to hear His

message, so He will not make it difficult for us to hear it, but we can block it out by hardening our hearts.

One of the reasons that the Psalmist wanted understanding, was so that he could properly apply God's Word, because he lived in a day when it was disregarded. "It is time for You to act, O LORD," he says in verse 126, "For they have regarded Your law as void." Since we do not know who the human author of Psalm 119 was, we can't fix it to a particular time in Israel's history, but then that doesn't really matter, as we can see how the principles in that psalm are generally applicable. It would be easy enough, in one sense, to follow God's Word if that was what everyone else around us was doing. But what if God's Word is unpopular, distrusted, and considered as being of no relevance? That seemed to be the case for the psalmist, since he says, "They have regarded Your law as void." In such a case we need understanding to be able to wisely apply God's Word in our own lives and circumstances, and we need to see the encouragement of God acting in our lives according to His Word, which strengthens us in our trust and obedience.

How does God do this for us? I think we have a clue in the final two verses: "Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold! Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way." God helps us by giving us a love for His Word, and an understanding that His Word is indeed true and right.

If we do not love something, we are unlikely to want to be involved with it, particularly if circumstances are against it anyway. That was the situation with the psalmist - "They have regarded Your law as void." It would have been easier for him to also walk away from that law. But, he loved God's Word: "I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!" As to why he loved God's Word, we can find out by other verses within the whole of Psalm 119. Here are a few examples:

- Verse 28: "My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word." The psalmist had found that God's Word had strengthened him when he was depressed.
- Verse 41: "Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD - Your salvation according to Your word." The psalmist had found deliverance through God's Word.
- Verses 49-50: "Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life." The Word of God had given life to the psalmist, and he staked his hope upon it.
- Verse 65: "You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word."
- Verse 105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." No wonder he loved this Word!

Since the psalmist loved God's Word, he was prepared to stick to it, even if it was generally disregarded. He wasn't going to throw away something that had given him life, hope and direction. We can see how this can apply to us today.

The psalmist was also convinced that God's Word was right. "Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way." If we think that God's Word is wrong, and inappropriate, we will not be inclined to keep it. But if we go back to the beginning of our section, verse 121, "I have done justice and righteousness," we remember that the very concepts of justice and righteousness are within God's Word. God's Word reveals the just and righteous God. Consequently, we trust His precepts. We know that what He says is right. We have this in another verse of this long psalm, verse 160: "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever." It is an incredibly bold claim, as it's scope extends to the whole of the Word for the whole of time!

This then, it seems to me, is the message of our section, verses 121-128 of Psalm 119 - a dynamic interaction between the reader, God's Word and God Himself, a kind of conversation where we pray back God's Word to God. I must confess, when I first approached this section to prepare this talk, I wondered how I would approach it and what spiritual food I would derive from it. It seemed like a difficult passage to bring out for our encouragement. It reminds me of the great Victorian preacher Charles Spurgeon's comments on Psalm 119, which I quoted in our first series in September 2017. Spurgeon wrote, 'I have been bewildered in the expanse of the One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm, ... Its dimensions and its depth alike overcame me. It spread itself out before me like a vast, rolling prairie, to which I could see no bound, and this alone created a feeling of dismay. Its expanse was unbroken by a bluff or headland, and hence it threatened a monotonous task, although the fear has not been realized.' He went on to say, I have now crossed the great plain for myself, but not without persevering, and, I will add, pleasurable, toil. ... Those who have never studied it may pronounce it commonplace, and complain of its repetitions; but to the thoughtful student it is like the great deep, full, so as never to be measured; and varied, so as never to weary the eye. In the same way, thinking of today's section as setting out the value of God's Word has been a blessing to me, and I hope it has been a blessing to you also.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on Psalm 119, the importance of God's Word, Verses 121-128, Ayin, talk number T1121.

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