

Psalm 119 The Beautiful Law of God: A Christian Reading (preached again on 11-5-2023)

Psalm 119 is, by far, the longest Psalm in the Bible. And, I would have to say the subject is, “The Law of God,” or God’s “way” revealing WHO He is, and WHAT He requires of us. We are not sure who the author is; many attribute it to David. But, it is really a poem about the Law of God. And it is arranged into 22 different sections of 8 verses. Each section coincides with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And each verse of each section begins with that letter. We miss this in the English. It is arranged in this way to help with the public reading and singing during worship. Writing it this way helps tremendously when memorizing. And throughout my time as a Christian, this has probably the most used Psalm in my quiet times. It is definitely one of my favorites. We aren’t going to read all of it this morning. But, I would like to explore this Psalm further, asking the question, “*How does this Psalm help us?*” “*What are the benefits for us as we consider this Psalm in our lives.*” This morning, I have 5 ways this Psalm helps us. Then, I would like to show how this Psalm is fulfilled in Christ.

1. This Psalm proclaims the holiness of God. Really, this Psalm is about God and his holy standard. There is an emphasis on righteous instruction. If you read the entire Psalm, you will see 9 main words, used over and over again. And though they are slightly different, they really express the same idea: God is a holy God and his instructions for us are right. They are right because they flow from God’s character. The 9 words used to express God’s standard are: law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, word, saying, and way. Take a look at vv. 1-9, where we find all of these: “**Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!** ² **Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,** ³ **who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!** ⁴ **You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.** ⁵ **Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!** ⁶ **Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.** ⁷ **I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules.** ⁸ **I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!** ⁹ **How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.**” These 9 words are used over and over again to express God’s righteous standard.

A good illustration is a ruler. When you want to measure for new blinds or measure pieces for a new floor you are putting in, what do you do. You don’t guess! You would never do that I hope! You get a ruler, something to measure with, a standard tool for measuring. In the same way, we have God’s standard. It is his holiness. And he has revealed his holiness to us in his Word.

2. This Psalm tells us what God requires from us. What does God require from us? God doesn’t simply give us a standard; He also demands obedience to this standard. Verse 4: “**You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.**” Throughout, the Psalmist emphasizes “walking” and “keeping.” Verses 1-2: “**Blessed . . . are those who walk in the law of the Lord . . . those who keep his testimonies.**” Verse 3: “**who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!**” Verse 5: “**Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!**” Verse 8: “**I will keep your statutes.**”

Now, I believe the Psalmist in this context is referring to the Law of Moses. This is what he would have known. He would have remembered that God delivered his people from Egypt and

led them to Mt. Sinai, where he gave the “law” to Moses, who then came down and delivered God’s instructions to the people. Though all men were without excuse, having a conscience and the law of God written on their hearts, only to Israel did God make himself known by giving them his law, stating clearly how they should live. When Moses came down from Sinai he repeated God’s instructions. Exod. 19:5-8: “**Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.**” ⁷ So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ **All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do . . .”** So, what is the requirement? Obedience to ALL his commands; obedience to his law. And in this Psalm we have a man who desires to do just that; obey.

Verse 5: “**Oh that my ways may be steadfast.**” Verse 17: “**Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.**” Verse 31: “**I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame.**” Verse 33: “**Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.**” Verse 34: “**Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.**” ETC.

Now, let me ask some questions: “*Did the Psalmist, or any person, ever live up to every part of the Law of Moses, or any of God’s commands before the Law of Moses?*” Even if they all kept every precept and every command, there was still a problem with the heart, which flowed from a sin nature. Jesus said, “*Men, you may have not committed adultery, but if you’ve ever looked at a woman lustfully, you’ve have not been totally obedient.*” And, *if you’ve ever thought an evil thought against your brother you’ve committed murder in your heart.* And what do we call disobedience to God’s standard, to God’s law? It is called sin. Our Psalmist KNEW he was a sinner and all he could do was fall upon the mercy of God. And I would argue that, by faith, he was waiting for God’s promise of salvation to ultimately come one day. Look at v. 41: “**Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise.**” And v. 156: “**Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your rules.**”

Now, another question: “*Are we supposed to live up to the Law of Moses?*” “*What do you think?*” Do we keep the washings, the ceremonial system of sacrifices, the 10 commandments? Do we stone adulterers? When we read this Psalm, it is very important for us to remember the context. It belongs in the Old Covenant, pre-Christ. The principles are there for us to learn from and obey. And the truth is this: God’s requirement is still obedience to his instructions, always. Since the Garden of Eden, it has always been, “OBEY ME AND LIVE!” “BE HOLY AS I AM HOLY!” But we must remember that the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant, was a precursor to the New Covenant in Christ. It prepared Israel for the coming of the Messiah. If they were honest with their hearts, they would have known they could not keep all God’s commands. They would have known that the blood of bulls and goats could have never brought them closer to God. And we see this with the Psalmist! (We will come back to this at the end.) The point is this: We know what God requires of us.

Quick Application: Before moving on to the next truth, let me say something about the specifics of God’s commands. They are good for us. They help us. They instruct us. There are many

verses in this Psalm that point this out. Three of the most famous are v. 9: **“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.”** V. 11 **“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”** And v. 108: **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** When you are having trouble in life making a decision, go to God’s word. When you wonder if something is wrong or right, go to his word. EVERYTHING we need for life and godliness is here.

3. This Psalm teaches us that godliness leads to happiness. Happiness is the natural outcome of godliness. Here, the Psalmist is HAPPY because God has given his requirements, his instructions. And he knows that obedience to God’s law will bring him happiness. Look at vv. 1-2: **“Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord; Blessed are those who keep his testimonies . . .”** Verse 14: **“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.”** Verse 47: **“For I find my delight in your commandments, which I love . . .”** Verse 56: **“This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts.”** Verse 97: **“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.”** Verse 103: **“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”** Verse 111: **“Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.”** Verse 143: **“Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight.”**

I have always told my kids, *“An obedient _____ is a happy _____.”* And, it is the same with me. And you know this to be true as well. The godlier my walk is in this life, the happier I am. The more assurance of salvation I have. Kids, are you happy when you are disobedient to your parents? Of course not! Husbands, when you constantly do not treat your wife as you ought, how do you feel. Wives, when you do not respect your husbands how do you feel. When you are not consistent in reading God’s word, how do you feel? When you are not faithful with gathering together with God’s people, how do you feel? Men, boys, when you look at something ungodly on the internet, how do you feel? Now, I am not saying that we must work our way to heaven through obedience. Christ was obedient. And we have an advocate, who goes before the- Father in our behalf. But, to the Christian, I am saying that happiness comes with practical godliness. Now, to the non-Christian, there will never be lasting happiness. Why? Because guilt remains outside of Christ. But, the happiest Christian is the most obedient Christian.

4. This Psalm motivates worship from the heart. Throughout this Psalm the writer considers God’s commands, and as he thinks about them and meditates upon them, his soul finds great delight in God. This is worship. V. 7: **“I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules.”** V. 54: **“Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning.”** V. 57: **“The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words.”** V. 62: **“At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules.”** V. 114: **“You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.”** V. 164: **“Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.”** VV. 169-172: **“Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word! ¹⁷⁰ Let my plea come before you; deliver me according to your word. ¹⁷¹ My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. ¹⁷² My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right.”**

Throughout my years this has been one of the most helpful Psalms to me. When I find myself cold and down, lacking in devotion and praise in my heart to God, I read and meditate on these

verses. There is so much more to this Psalm than mere outward obedience to God's law. The heart that worships at the thought of these truths is blessed. I want to encourage you to do the same.

5. This Psalm creates a desire for a deeper knowledge of God and his ways. Look at v. 18: **"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."** When the Psalmist considered God's law and all the wisdom behind his commands and his instructions, he wanted to know more. When we consider God and his ways, we want to know more of him. I think of The Chronicles of Narnia in "The Last Battle. "Greater up and Father in." (check this one out.) The more we read of God's Word, the more want to delve into it, the more we want to know. His ways are endless. All of Solomon's wisdom was not even the tip of the tip of the iceberg compared to God and all his ways.

V. 27: **"Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works."** V. 64: **"The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!"** V. 73: **"Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments."** V. 96: **"I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad."** Verses 130-131: **"The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments."** V. 144: **"Your testimonies are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live."**

We need this Psalm and these truths. And we need the motive of this Psalmist. Christianity can become sooooo commonplace. Oh how we need a deeper desire for God and his ways! This is what I want! Throughout the years, this has been my go to Psalm. When my faith feels weak, I read these words. When my prayers don't seem to go to the ceiling, I read these words. When I am lazy spiritually and feel that my pursuit of God has come to nothing, I pray these words. When I need revival in my heart, I cry out with the words of this Psalm. Brothers and sisters, if you have never used this Psalm in these ways, I pray that you will in the coming days.

6. This Psalm finds its fulfillment in Christ. God's instruction (law) finds its fulfillment in Christ. In other words, we cannot stand up to the test. We have broken his standard. We have not been obedient to his instructions. And this leaves us with no hope in and of ourselves. In order to truly apply this Psalm, we must look to Christ. Only in Christ does this Psalm find its fulfillment.

Very quickly, let me recall the rich young ruler of Matt. 19. He came to Jesus and asked, **"What must I do to inherit eternal life."** Jesus said, **"Keep the commandments."** And the man said, **"Which ones?"** Jesus said, **"Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself."** (Notice Jesus did not mention the first 4 commandments, those dealing with the worship of God from the heart.) Then the man says, **"All these I have kept. What do I still lack."** Jesus said, **"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me."** And the man went away because he had great possessions. You see, Jesus applied Psalm 119 for us. Instead of simply saying, "keep the commandments," he also said follow me.

Jesus took the commands of God to their ultimate fulfillment by saying, “**follow me.**” He elevated the law of God to love from the heart to the Messiah, God’s only Son. God is concerned with the heart, really a heart that loves and follows Jesus. This is faith. This is union with Christ.

In Christ, we have God’s standard. For He is God in the flesh.

In Christ, God’s righteous requirements are fulfilled. He lived a perfect life in motive and in action.

In Christ, we find all happiness. We find happiness because He obeyed God’s law on our behalf.

In Christ, we worship God. When we consider the gospel, our hearts are glad and we worship.

In Christ, we desire to know him deeper. For all the wisdom of God is found in Christ. When Christ becomes more beautiful, so God becomes more beautiful.

“The Law came through Moses. Grace and Truth came through Jesus.”

So, the next time you read this Psalm, remember: 1) It proclaims God’s holiness; 2) It teaches us God’s requirement for us: obedience; 3) It teaches us that godliness leads to happiness; 4) It incites us to worship; 5) It causes us to want to know God and his ways more deeply; 6) And, it is fulfilled and understood in Christ.