

"A Word About the Word"

Psalm 119 (Part 1)

Baxter Exum (#979)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
July 20, 2008



Introduction:

Most of us would probably agree that in our society there are many things that people seem to need. We need to take a vacation. We need to have cheap gas. We need to have a quick commute to work every day. We need all kinds of different things in our society, but one of the things that many people in the world think they do not need is the word of God.

Obviously, though, those of us here this morning have a different view. And so as we study God's word this morning, I would like for us to remind each other about the importance of the Bible as we study what the word of God has to say about the word of God. I would like for us to focus our thoughts this morning on the longest chapter of the longest book anywhere in the entire Bible. I am referring, of course, to the book of **Psalm 119**. **»PPT»** We know that the Bible contains 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Those books are divided up into 1,189 chapters. And with 176 verses, **Psalm 119** is the longest of those chapters.

In our pew Bibles, the chapter starts on page 974 and goes on for 10 pages, ending on page 983. And with a chapter that long, we might be tempted to think, **"There is no way I can read that in one setting—it is too long. So maybe I'll just skip that one!"** And then maybe if we do get around to reading it, we get through the first few verses, and we discover that the Psalm tends to repeat itself. And so maybe we are tempted to ask ourselves, **"Why are we spending our time on such a long and repetitive Psalm?"**

However, as we start looking at it very carefully, we realize that it is actually quite interesting—the Psalm is quite unique. We find that **Psalm 119** is divided into 22 sections of 8 verses each, one section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Most English translations help us out a little bit—you might notice that each section is given a heading—each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, and so on). Not only that, but each of the 8 verses in each section actually begin with the letter of the heading! This certainly would have been helpful for memorizing such a long Psalm. Today we might refer to it as an "acrostic." I am thinking of the word JOY and how we sometimes teach it to the little children—Jesus first, Yourself last, and Others in-between, J-O-Y, Jesus, Others, and then Yourself. Well, in **Psalm 119**, the verses are arranged around the alphabet. If we were doing this in English, the first section would be labeled "A," and each of the first 8 verses would start with "A" words. The next 8 verses would all start with "B" words, and so

on. And so the author put a lot of thought and effort into arranging this Psalm in this particular way.

Tradition tells us that **Psalm 119** was written by King David when he was a young man, as he was being pursued by King Saul. He was stuck in what seemed to be an impossible situation. And yet in spite of these difficult circumstances, it is significant that the longest of Psalms, in the longest of books, is devoted to the praise of God's word. Over and over again, we read about God's law, the Lord's statutes, God's ordinances, God's precepts, commands, decrees, and on and on and on. In fact, over the next week, it might be interesting to go through all 176 verses and actually underline every reference to the word of God. I have done it, and there are just a few verses without a direct reference to the word of God. This will be our homework assignment for next week—sometime during the week, to read through **Psalm 119** and to underline every reference to the word of God.

This morning, though, I would like for us to hit the highlights of **Psalm 119** as we look together at the benefits of reading and studying the word of God.

I. One of the first things we notice as we look at Psalm 119 is that THE WORD OF GOD BRINGS US GREAT JOY. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at the first two verses—**Psalm 119:1-2**. Please consider what the word of God says about itself. The Bible says, ***"How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart."*** I hope you will mark your Bible with me, because in **verse 1** we read about the ***"law of the Lord,"*** and in **verse 2** we read about ***"His testimonies."*** If you underline ***"law"*** and ***"testimonies,"*** then you already have a head start on the homework assignment for next week! The Bible here is talking about itself, and the Bible says that those who walk according to God's law are ***"blessed."*** The word ***"blessed"*** is used in both verses, and when we go looking for the meaning of the word ***"blessed,"*** we find that the word refers to being in a state of happiness. And so another way of reading **verses 1-2** would be, ***"How happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How happy are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart."*** The word of God has the ability to make us happy!

Certainly we would agree that God wants us to be happy. God wants us to enjoy life, and He has given us the opportunity for great joy by giving us His word. God wants us to understand that true happiness comes only when we fill the empty hole in our hearts with His word.

We see another aspect of this joy in **verse 54**. If you look back with me at **verse 54**, the author says (referring to God), ***"Your statutes are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."*** Underline ***"statutes!"*** The word of God, therefore, has caused the author to sing. The Bible is the source of his songs as he travels through this life.

We see a similar thought a little bit later in this Psalm, in **verse 111**. The author of the Psalm says in **verse 111**, ***"I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart."*** And again, the ***"testimonies"*** of God bring joy to the heart.

This joy is also referred to over in **verse 162**. The author says (in **verse 162**), ***"I rejoice at Your word, as one who finds great spoil."*** Spoil refers to plunder—the riches left over after conquering a great city. Finding God's word, therefore, can be compared to finding a great treasure. Today we might say that finding God's word can be compared to winning a huge prize. And the author of this Psalm says that he rejoices at God's word like someone ***"who finds a great spoil."*** We remember the parable that Jesus taught in **Matthew 13:44-46**, where Jesus said, ***"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."*** So first of all, then, as we look at the benefits of studying God's word, we find that the word of God has the ability to bring us great joy.

II. As we continue looking at Psalm 119, we also find that GOD'S WORD PROVIDES FREEDOM. »PPT»

This is not what the world thinks of when they think of God's word, and yet if you will, please look with me at **verses 44-45—Psalm 119:44-45**. Starting in **verse 44**, the author says, ***"So I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts."*** As I understand it, the Hebrew word that we translate here as ***"liberty,"*** goes back to a word referring to a wide open space. Liberty, therefore, is the opposite of being confined. Liberty means that we have options. Liberty means that we have freedom to roam around. Liberty means that we are not constricted. And again, this does not really make sense from a worldly point of view. The world sees the word of God as being restrictive.

But as Christians, we know that that is not the case. I think it was Augustine who said, ***"Love God and do as you please."*** When we truly love God, what pleases us and what pleases God will be the same thing. When we love God (according to **1 John 5:4**), ***"...His commandments are not burdensome."***

We think of the nation of Israel being delivered from slavery in Egypt. Looking back on it, we can see that they were being given freedom. But at the time, they did not always believe it. At the time, they whined and complained. They told Moses they wanted to go back to Egypt. Brothers and sisters, in the words of **1 Corinthians 10:6**, ***"Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved."*** We are to learn from their example. We must understand that the word of God brings freedom!

III. As we look back to Psalm 119, we also find that THE WORD OF GOD PROVIDES COMFORT—ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF SUFFERING. »PPT»

As far as I can tell, there are more than 60 verses in this Psalm that mention trials, or suffering, or persecution. As God's people, we will face difficulties. Horrible things will happen to us, just as horrible things happen to people in the world. Christians get sick and die. Christians get hurt in accidents. Christians get picked on because of their faith. But through it all, God's word brings comfort. As the author says in verse 165, "***Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.***" Bad things may happen, but God's word can keep us strong. As the author puts it in verse 76, "***O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant.***" And so the word of God brings comfort.

A more comprehensive passage is found in verses 81-88...

- 81 My soul languishes for Your salvation;
I wait for Your word.***
- 82 My eyes fail with longing for Your word,
While I say, "When will You comfort me?"***
- 83 Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
I do not forget Your statutes.***
- 84 How many are the days of Your servant?
When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?***
- 85 The arrogant have dug pits for me,
Men who are not in accord with Your law.***
- 86 All Your commandments are faithful;
They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!***
- 87 They almost destroyed me on earth,
But as for me, I did not forsake Your precepts.***
- 88 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness,
So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.***

And then in verse 92, "***If Your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction.***" Many of us (based on personal experience) can say the same thing today. And so again, the word of God brings comfort.

IV. As we look back at Psalm 119, we also find that GOD'S WORD BRINGS WISDOM. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at verses 97-104. The author says...

- 97 O how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day.***
- 98 Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever mine.***
- 99 I have more insight than all my teachers,
for Your testimonies are my meditation.***

¹⁰⁰ ***I understand more than the aged,
because I have observed Your precepts.***
¹⁰¹ ***I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
that I may keep Your word.***
¹⁰² ***I have not turned aside from Your ordinances,
for You Yourself have taught me.***
¹⁰³ ***How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!***
¹⁰⁴ ***From Your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.***

In **verse 98**, we find that God's commandments had made David wiser than his enemies. According to **verse 100**, the precepts of God had made him understand more than the aged. According to **verse 104**, the precepts of God brought him "***understanding***." Certainly we can learn from those who are older than we are. We can learn from the experience of others—the Bible tells us to do this, and yet true wisdom comes from the word of God. As David said in **verse 66**, "***Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments***." The word of God brings wisdom!

As the apostle Paul wrote to the young preacher Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, "***All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work***." The Bible brings us wisdom!

V. As we close our thoughts on the importance of God's word, I should also point out from Psalm 119 that THE WORD OF GOD PROVIDES LIGHT. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at **Psalm 119:105**. As David wrote about the word of God, he said in **verse 105**, "***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path***." Certainly we understand the value of light. We appreciate the sun. We appreciate the lights in this room that allow us to read the word of God. And yet David is not talking here about any light—he is talking about a lamp you hold in your hand that lights a dark path.

In fact, one paraphrase of the Bible puts it this way, "***Your words are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me, and keep me from stumbling***" (The Living Bible). Of course, the word "***flashlight***" is not actually in the Bible, but that is the idea that comes across here.

I am holding an oil lamp similar to one that would have been used in ancient Israel. There is a reservoir for holding olive oil, and then there is a little "spout" for holding the wick. This is a reproduction of an ancient lamp. I found it at a Jewish museum just outside of Cleveland. It is just like the one in the picture on the wall. You can see that it fits in the palm of the hand and could have easily been used like a flashlight.

This life we are living can be compared to a narrow winding pathway through the dark. This life is full of uncertainty and pain, but the word of God is like a flashlight—like an oil lamp—that shows us the dangers on each side and points us in the right direction. The word of God does not necessarily tell us what to do for the next 50 years, but it lights the way at least enough to take the next step—one step at a time—like a flashlight on a trail in the woods—looking out for roots, and rocks, and stumps, things we might trip on in the dark. The Bible gives us direction.

Without the light of God's word, we are going down the path of life in darkness—being led only by our feelings and the circumstances that happen to come our way. And so King David says that the word of God is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path.

Conclusion & Invitation:

- The word of God, therefore, provides **JOY**—"*How happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How happy are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart*" (**verses 1-2**).
- The word of God brings us **FREEDOM**—"*So I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts*" (**verses 44-45**).
- The word of God provides **comfort** in times of suffering and persecution—"*Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble*" (**verse 165**).
- The word of God provides **WISDOM**—"*From Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way*" (**verse 104**).
- And finally, the word of God provides **LIGHT** on the dark path of life—"*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*" (**verse 105**).

This morning we have discovered that the author of this Psalm spent all 176 verses praising the word of God. Nearly every verse says at least something about the Bible. As we close, we need to ask ourselves, "What is OUR attitude toward the word of God? Do we love the word of God as King David did?" And again, over this coming week, I would encourage each of us here this morning to take a pen and go through our Bibles and to underline every reference to the word of God in **Psalm 119**.

Lord willing, we will come together next Sunday morning, and I would like for us to look at this Psalm again, only next week I would like for us to look at some ideas from **Psalm 119** that will help us to actually come to a deeper understanding of God's word.

As we discovered at the beginning of this morning's lesson, this Psalm is an acrostic—each section representing a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Before we close, I should point out another acrostic—this one in English—one that will also help us to appreciate the importance of the word of God. The acrostic is based on the word "**BIBLE.**" **B-I-B-L-E. Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.**

This morning, if you are not yet ready to leave this earth, if you are not yet prepared to meet God, we would encourage you to look to the Bible for instruction. The Bible teaches that God offered His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus died, He was buried, and He was raised up on the third day. This is the good news, this is the gospel, and we respond to the good news by turning away from all forms of sin and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our past sins. At that point, we are born into the family of God and we begin the Christian life. If you are ready to take that step, we would encourage you to let us know about your decision as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org