



Sermon Notes: Cameron Webber,

22 September 2024

“The Best Book to Read is the Bible”

Readings: Psalm 119:1-8, 9-16, 97-104, 105-112, 169-176;
Luke 24:44-49; Acts 17:11-15

Note: *This written version incorporates some of the content of the children’s spot, as well as giving additional verse references in the sermon. After the kids’ spot, which focussed on verse 105, we sang, ‘The Best Book to Read is the Bible.’*

Today we are starting mini-series in which we will look at three Psalms, three of the songs of Ancient Israel.

We commenced our service with the shortest Psalm - Psalm 117 – just two verses praising the LORD for his love and faithfulness, but today we are looking at the longest Psalm – Psalm 119.

The Structure of Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is 176 verses long and broken into twenty-two stanzas, each with eight verses. Our English translations usually identify the stanzas with a funny name and a funny symbol:

- Aleph א, Beth ב, Gimel ג, ...

They are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (in alphabetical order). The Psalm was originally written in Hebrew and in each stanza, each of the verses begins with the same Hebrew letter. Because that is not obvious in English translations, the Hebrew letters are put in as headings.

So Psalm 119 is an Alphabetic Acrostic, which gives it structure and is an aid to memory, if you know Hebrew! And if you don’t, it can help you learn the Hebrew alphabet!

The Theme of the Psalm

One of the best known verses in the Psalm gives us a clue as to what the whole Psalm is about:

Your word is a lamp for my feet
a light on my path. [Psalm 119:105]

Psalm 119 is about God’s Word, which becomes more apparent as we look at the first stanza, So let’s read it...

Reading Psalm 119:1-8

Did you hear the different terms the writer uses for God’s Word? There were six different words in that opening stanza, and if we read on through the whole Psalm, we find another two. Eight words in all to capture some aspect of God’s Word:

law (torah), statutes, precepts, decrees, commands, laws (mishpatim), word(s) and promise.

Eight terms in total, spread though the Psalm. At least six are used in every stanza (every eight verses) with four stanzas using all eight terms.

You don’t have to read far to get the point: The writer is devoted to the Word of God as the way to know the God of the Word.

The writer of this Psalm was dealing with a theme that filled his life and covered the length and breadth and height and depth of his relationship with God. It has been well noted that, 'Nothing less than the full power of language would suffice, so he uses all the [synonyms] similes available to him, and the whole alphabet as a symbol of that.'

Let's read some more...

Psalm 119:9-16, 97-104, 105-112, 169-176

The Bible really is the best book to read.

As we read just some of Psalm 119, you would have noticed the devotion of the Psalmist to the word of God as he praises God for his Word, piling up those eight terms, stanza after stanza, attaching different adjectives and verbs to them.

Well I hope you noticed. If you didn't (and even if you did), go home and read the whole thing. It's the longest Psalm, but still only takes a quarter of an hour to read out loud.

Feel the strength of the repetition as he praises God for his word, and speaks of his response, and as he expresses his continued need of God's care.

There is no sense of legalism here, but rather a passionate devotion to the Word of God, and to the God of the Word.

It's a rich and multifaceted Psalm and we can't really do it justice in one morning, but a few comments are in order, as we see that the best book to read really is the Bible.

1. **God's Word is...**

And the first thing to note is what the Psalmist says about God's Word through the adjectives attached to the eight nouns he uses for God's Word.

Good

Verse 39 your laws are **good**.

Right

Verse 137 your laws are **right**.

Verse 144 Your statutes are forever **right**;

Verse 128 I consider all your precepts **right**,

Righteous

Verses 7, 62, 75, 106 your **righteous** laws.

Verse 38 The statutes you have laid down are **righteous**;

Verse 172 all your commands are **righteous**

Eternal [Verse 96]

Verse 89 Your word, O LORD, is **eternal**; it stands firm in the heavens.

Verse 160 all your righteous laws are **eternal** [Verse 91]

Verse 152 I learned from your statutes that you established them to **last forever**.

True

- Verse 30 laws = way of **truth**
- Verse 51 all your commands are **true**...
- Verse 142 your law is **true**
- Verse 160 All your words are **true**

Trustworthy

- Verse 138 [your statutes] are fully **trustworthy**.
- Verse 86 All your commands are **trustworthy**;

Wonderful

- Verse 129

The Psalmist has a clear view of the wonderful nature of God's Word. *But what about us?* When I say, 'Bible' or 'Word of God,' do you think, good, right, righteous, eternal, true, trustworthy, wonderful?

That's what the Psalmist thought. And it's not just as an academic exercise, because if God's Word is all those things, it demands a response, so with the Psalmist (v18) we pray, '*Open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your law.*'

2. The Psalmist Responds...

As you read through Psalm 119 you can't help but see these are not pious declarations but a heartfelt response.

Rejoicing

- Verse 14 I **rejoice** in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches
- Verse 162 I **rejoice** in your promise....
- Verse 72 [Your] law is more **precious** to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.
- Verse 103 How **sweet** are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Delight

- Verse 16 I **delight** in your decrees;
- Verse 24 Your statutes are **my delight**;
- Verse 143 your commands are **my delight**.
- Verse 77, your law is **my delight**. (v 70)
174

This delight and rejoicing is not casual and flippant, because the psalmist also says...

Awe

- Verse 161 my heart **trembles** at your word.
- Verse 120 I stand **in awe** of your laws.

And the Psalmist speaks repeatedly of his love for God's word....

Love

- Verse 97, 163 Oh, how I **love** your law!
- Verse 127 I **love** your commands more than gold, more than pure gold [v48]
- Verse 167, 119 I **love** [your statutes] greatly.
- Verse 159 I **love** your precepts;
- Verse 20 My soul is consumed with **longing** for your laws at all times.
- Verse 40 How I **long** for your precepts!

All of which leads to praise...

Praise

- Verse 164 Seven times a day I **praise** you for your righteous laws.
- Verse 54 Your decrees are the theme of **my song** wherever I lodge.
- Verse 172 May my tongue **sing** of your word,

But the 'emotional' response to God's wonderful word is not enough...

Learning

- Verse 171 May my lips overflow with praise, for you **teach me** your decrees [v68, 124, 12]
- Verse 7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws

The Psalmist recognises that he needs to learn about God's Word, to learn God's Word...

- Verse 18 **Open my eyes** that I may see wonderful things in your law.
- Verse 27 **Let me understand the teaching** of your precepts;
- Verse 73 **give me understanding to learn** your commands.
- Verse 108 **teach me** your laws.
- Verse 125 **give me discernment** that I may understand your statutes.
- Verse 169 **give me understanding** according to your word.
- Verse 130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives **understanding** to the simple.

But this learning is not automatic, it requires action, so he says...

- Verse 16 I will not neglect your word.

And so he meditates on it - reflects carefully and prayerfully on God's Word.

Meditate

- Verse 48 I **meditate** on your decrees [v 23]
- Verse 15, 78 I will **meditate** on your precepts.
- Verse 97 Oh, how I love your law! I **meditate** on it all day long.
- Verse 99 I **meditate** on your statutes.

- Verse 148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,
that I may **meditate** on your promises.
- Verse 94 I have **sought** out your precepts.
- Verse 95 I will **ponder** your statutes.
- Verse 30 I have **set my heart** on your laws.
- Verse 11 I have **hidden** your word in my heart

And the learning, seeking, meditating are not an end in themselves.
He actually does what God's word says...

Obey

- Verse 69 I **keep** your precepts with all my heart.

He **obeys** them.

The learning, understanding, discernment he desires is for a purpose...

- Verse 33 Teach me, O LORD, to **follow** your decrees;
then I will **keep** them to the end.
- Verse 34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law
and **obey** it with all my heart.
- Verse 11 I have hidden your word in my heart
[so] that I might not sin against you.
- Verse 8, 145 I will **obey** your decrees; [v112]
- Verse 17 I will **obey** your word. [v57]
- Verse 44 I will always **obey** your law, [v106]
- Verse 56 I **obey** your precepts. [v168]
- Verse 88 I will **obey** the statutes of your mouth. [v129, 167, 146, 168]
- Verse 60 I will hasten and not delay to **obey** your commands.

He uses descriptive actions...

- Verse 59 I have **considered** my ways
and have **turned my steps** to your statutes.
- Verse 32 I **run** in the path of your commands.
- Verse 133 **Direct my footsteps** according to your word; let no sin rule over me.
- Verse 105 Your word is a **lamp** to my feet and a **light** for my path.

He knows obedience is required.

- Verse 9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By **living** according to your word.

Trust in God's Promise

But it is not a legalistic response. He recognises that he needs God's strength, and God's grace - which also comes through God's word. He knows that for all his love and obedience he still needs to **trust** in God's promise

And so he prays...

- Verse 28 strengthen me according to your word.
Verse 29 be gracious to me through your law.
Verse 58 be gracious to me according to your promise.
Verse 41 May your unfailing love come to me, O LORD,
 your salvation according to your promise;

Although he seeks to live, according to God's word ...he knows that salvation comes from God

- Verse 166 I wait for your salvation, O LORD, and I follow your commands.
Verse 81 My soul faints with longing for your salvation
 but I have put my hope in your word.
Verse 114 You are my refuge and my shield;
 I have put my hope in your word. [v74, 81]

And his final word is one of repentance. For all his love and obedience, he knows he is like a straying sheep who is dependent on the loving kindness and mercy of the shepherd...

- Verse 176 I have strayed like a lost sheep.
 Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

The Shepherd who seeks the sheep in Psalm 119, is the same Shepherd spoken of in Psalm 23. And we too need a shepherd, and Jesus came as the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to look for the one (Matthew 18:12-13); the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

And so we turn to the Jesus, the Living Word of God to whom the written Word points.

3. How do you Respond...

In the New Testament we see the same concern for God's revelation in his word. Paul says to Timothy...

'Continue in what you have learned and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

The Written Word - points to the Jesus, the Living Word. All the promises of God find their fulfilment in him. He is our salvation as we place our faith in him.

And Paul goes on...

'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.' (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Written Word teaches those who have received God's salvation how we are to live as his children. As we said with the children...

'Your word is a lamp for my feet
a light on my path.' (Psalm 119:105)

God's Word, the Bible shows us the way to God and the way to live for him.

Our doctrinal position holds the Bible to be the Word of God; but is your response like that of the Psalmist? Can you say with the Psalmist (v16) 'I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.' Imagine if we had even half the passion for the Word of God, and the God of the Word, that the Psalmist has!

But it can be easier to slump in front of the TV or pick up the iPad and start scrolling, than to ponder God's precepts, or seek out his statutes. It's easy to say, 'let's not be legalistic about this, I'm saved by grace, I don't need to have a quiet time each day.' But if the amount of time we spend in reading the Bible each week, numbers in minutes, that can be counted on the fingers of one or even both our hands, how do we expect to grow in our relationship with God, how do we expect to grow in godliness, what do we expect the Holy Spirit is going to use in making us more Christ-like if not the sword of the Spirit - which is the Word of God.

What's shaping you? Is it TV, popular culture, or the Holy Spirit applied Word of God?

The Psalmist says...

v105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

v11 I have hidden your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you.

That's why he doesn't neglect it, but what about you, what about me?

Three things quick practical things...

1. Be regular and frequent at Church, to hear the Bible, the word of God proclaimed (and bring your Bible).
2. Be part of a Bible Study / Home Group / Growth Group. Whatever you call it, be in a small group where you can study the Bible together.
3. Read the Bible individually each day.

And take the opportunities to be part of additional things. There are so many opportunities, so many tools, conferences, seminars, (including online). Use all that is available, but do not neglect the Word.

And the Bible is not only for us. God's Word is able to make people wise for salvation, so be ready to read it with a non-Christian friend. Take a handful or more of the Gospels of John that are in foyer. Be ready to give one to a colleague or neighbour or family member.

Conclusion

May we say/pray with the Psalmist...

Verse 16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word,

Verse 18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law,
because the best Book to read really is the Bible.

Amen