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Sermon Notes

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## **A Masterpiece of Praise for God’s Perfect Word**

### **Psalm 119**

#### I. Introduction

Illus. Writing systems... letter by letter or hieroglyphic pictographs (like *kanji*)

***Revelation 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega...”***

***Matthew 5:18 “... until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.”***

A. God’s Word: a miracle

B. Psalm 119: amazing in its own right

1. Letter by letter meditation on/praise for God’s written word
2. Twenty-two letters, eight verses per letter = 176 total verses
  - a. “Aleph”, “Beth”, “Gimel” printed in your English Bibles
  - b. each set of eight verses begins with the letter printed above it
  - c. Psalmist accomplished an amazing intellectual achievement
  - d. longest “chapter” in the Bible
3. Every verse but three have some mention of the written word of God
  - a. Psalmist uses ten different Hebrew terms for the written Word of God

law, testimony, way, precept, statute, decree, commandment, judgment, ordinance, word

- b. PROJECT: find the three verses that have no mention of God’s word (vs. 90, 122, 132)

C. Our purpose: To see the scope and grandeur of this Psalm that we may fall in love with God’s written word all over again

## II. God's Overall Goal: A Blessed Life of Complete, Joyful Obedience to Him

### A. Purpose stated (vs. 1-3)

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.  
<sup>2</sup> Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. <sup>3</sup> They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.*

### God's purpose in Psalm 119: A Blessed Life of Complete, Joyful Obedience to Him

1. The life is described carefully in Ps. 119
2. Note the descriptions

blameless ways, walk according to the law, wholehearted seeking of God

3. God's purpose: not merely obedience, but wholehearted joyful obedience!!

### **Who seek him with all their heart**

#### B. God's Intention in giving us Scripture

*<sup>4</sup> You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.*

*<sup>152</sup> Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever.*

1. God expects full obedience to his precepts
2. The Scripture need no new additions, deletions, corrections, adjustments... they are eternal
3. Scripture is a means to an end... transformation from rebellion to wholehearted obedience

#### C. Does the Law save??

1. BUT I thought Paul repudiated salvation by law
2. Why does the Psalmist rejoice so much in the written laws of God?
3. Answer: salvation is bigger than justification
  - a. not justified by law
  - b. but saved in order to obey the law wholeheartedly!!

***Romans 8:4 [Christ died for us] "... in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."***

Illus. John Bunyan's poem: " 'Run, John, run!' the Law commands; but gives you neither feet nor hands! Far better news the gospel brings—it bids you fly, and gives you wings!"

The very picture of freedom! Joyful soaring with a feeling of exhilaration; total freedom! Yet the Psalmist seems to say the exact same thing!

*vs. 32 “I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”*

Is that not the very picture of freedom? Joyful running along the path of God’s commands? Delighted heart-felt obedience, total freedom from sin

D. Is the Law a delight or a burden?

1. Scribes and Pharisees made it a burden

***Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.***

2. Jesus said his burden is light

***Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”***

3. Apostle John understood that freedom

***1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome***

Does obedience to God’s law feel like a burden to you? Then sit at the feet of this Psalmist, for he seems to have learned the same lesson John did:

14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

45 I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.

47 I delight in your commands because I love them.

54 Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge.

72 The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

111 Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.

162 I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil.

How to we get this joyful passion about God's Word? Psalm 119 has the answer!

## II. God's First Powerful Tool: The Word

### A. The nature of God's word

#### 1. Psalm 119 describes God's word

good ancient righteous trustworthy eternal unshakable perfect boundless  
enlightening wonderful tested true right delightful

#### 2. Timeless

**52** *I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find comfort in them.*

**89** *Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. <sup>90</sup> Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. <sup>91</sup> Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.*

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

#### 3. Perfect

**96** *To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless.*

**137** *Righteous are you, O LORD, and your laws are right. <sup>138</sup> The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.*

**140** *Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.*

#### 4. Effective (They make a change on us!)

They produce in us: joy, delight, obedience, wisdom, fear of the Lord, worship

#### 5. Delightful

Three great categories of Scripture to direct our lives: God's commands, God's promises, God's warnings

Now... we either obey or disobey His commands... if we obey, we benefit from His positive promises; if we disobey, we are under His warnings

### B. God's Commands: Not Burdensome, But Enlightening

#### 1. The commands of God give guidance to a free life

**vs. 32** *“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”*

Illus. God’s commands are like railway tracks, and the train is free running on them

2. God’s commands result in a wise life

**66** *Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.*

3. Therefore, God’s commands are delightful for they give direction

**35** *Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.*

The Psalmist constantly praises God for His commands, and they are the path of His life

Next time we look at Ps. 119, we’ll talk about how God’s words produce godly lives through obedience to His commands

C. God’s Promises: Future Blessings on an Obedient Life

**2 Peter 1:3-4** *“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness ... He has given us His very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”*

1. Psalm 119: Psalmist constantly rejoices in God’s promises
2. Promises of salvation

**41** *May your unfailing love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise*

**123** *My eyes fail, looking for your salvation, looking for your righteous promise.*

3. Promises of God’s grace, love, and comfort

**58** *I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.*

**76** *May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.*

4. Promises of rescue from trouble

**50** *My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.*

5. God always keeps His promises... they are absolutely guaranteed

**140** *Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.*

6. These promises are the basis of the Psalmist’s confident prayers

**116** *Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live*

**154** *preserve my life according to your promise.*

**170** *May my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise.*

Illus. God does not answer our prayers... God answers His purposes through our prayers

The Psalmist knows he's praying according to God's will when He prays for God to fulfill His promises!!

D. God's Warnings: Threatened Curses on a Disobedient Life

Psalm 119 does not merely rejoice in blessings... it fears God's curses on disobedience

**21** *You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands.*

**70** *Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law.*

**118** *You reject all who stray from your decrees, for their deceitfulness is in vain.*

**119** *All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross; therefore I love your statutes.*

**120** *My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.*

**155** *Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek out your decrees.*

E. Goal of God's word: UNDERSTANDING

1. What kind of understanding? Ultimately of the nature and purposes of God; right relationship to God

Understanding = wisdom

**Proverbs 1:7** *"The fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom."*

**79** *May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes.*

2. SOURCES OF UNDERSTANDING

- a. understanding comes from God

**73** *Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.*

- b. understanding comes from God's word

**104** *I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.*

**130** *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

- c. understanding comes from prayer over texts of Scripture

**169** *May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.*

d. understanding comes through deep meditation on Scripture

### 3. FRUITS OF UNDERSTANDING

a. understanding ensures life

**144** *Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live.*

b. understanding promotes obedience

**34** *Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.*

**104** *I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.*

c. obedience promotes understanding ... NOTE THE CYCLE!!

**100** *I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.*

d. understanding promotes meditation (which promotes deeper understanding) NOTE THE CYCLE!!

**27** *Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.*

Summary: Psalm 119 reveals the nature of Scripture... true, holy, good, trustworthy; it shows that Scripture is made up of three categories: command, promise, and warning; the goal of Scripture is understanding resulting in wholehearted obedience... the fear of the Lord; this understanding comes from God through prayer and meditation over texts of Scripture

## III. God's Second Powerful Tool: Prayer over the Word

A. Psalm 119: Two-way communication

1. Every verse but the first three and 115 are addressed directly to God
2. God speaks through the Word to the Psalmist
3. The Psalmist speaks the Word back to God

**vs. 9-11** *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word In my heart that I might not sin against you.”*

**vs. 105** *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”*

4. Word PLUS prayer most powerful combination for growth in godliness

B. Two key types of prayer

1. Psalmist prays for God to teach him

**169** *May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.*

a. fifteen times, he asks God to teach him/help him understand Scripture

**12** *Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.*

b. prayer extends even to Psalmist's own mind

**18** *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*

c. idea is clear: unless you teach me, I will NOT understand your Bible

**19** *I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.*

d. Scriptures are difficult for anyone... impossible unless God adds His light by Spirit

e. great form of goodness and love: direct teaching from God

**64** *The earth is filled with your love, O LORD; teach me your decrees.*

**68** *You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.*

**124** *Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees.*

f. deep conversation over the Psalmist's soul

**26** *I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees.*

The Psalmist brings his life before God, and God answers very directly with texts of Scripture

So many people are seeking words from God in a direct form of communication... "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." God can and does speak immediately to us, but for the most part, He speaks most clearly by illuminating the Scriptures directly to our souls.

g. focus of God's teaching: understanding to produce obedience

**33** *Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end.*

**34** *Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.*

**102** *I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.*

2. Psalmist prays for God to cause him to obey

a. reminiscent of Augustine

Augustine: "Give what you command, and command what you will!"



God commands things of us, then works the command in us by faith, by His Spirit, and by His word

b. so Psalmist asks God for HIS OWN OBEDIENCE!!

*5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!*

*10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.*

*29 Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.*

*35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.*

*36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.*

*37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.*

*80 May my heart be blameless toward your decrees, that I may not be put to shame.*

*133 Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.*

*145 I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees.*

*146 I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes.*

#### IV. Summary and Application

- A. Psalm 119 an extended and complex poem of praise to God for His written word
- B. Psalm 119 tells us the nature of Scripture
- C. Psalm 119 tells us the purpose of Scripture:

To bring believers into a blessed life of wholehearted obedience to God in the fear of the Lord

- D. Psalm 119 gives us two great tools to accomplish this: the perfect word itself & prayer

The Psalmist gives a beautiful example of method for growth in holiness: it is a how-to manual for growth!!

#### Application:

1. Commit yourself to growth in your knowledge of Scripture
2. Begin by praying to God for a hunger for the word
3. Begin each time of reading Scripture with prayer for understanding

4. Prayer for insight.... Deep reading/meditation/memorization... prayer for obedience to what you've learned... then go obey!!