

The Redeemed Heart
 Psalm 119:89-96
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This morning we are returning to Psalm 119. We started this series in the summer of 2018. The original plan was to preach through the first eleven stanzas and then come back the summer of 2019 and cover the last eleven stanzas. That was not the Lord's plan and we only finished Luke on September 15th.

I want to do a bit of a review as we return to Psalm 119. In the summer of 2018 we worked through the first 88 verses of Psalm 119. This fall, Lord willing, we will work through vv. 89-176, which are the last eleven stanzas of Psalm 119.

The psalms are always a feast for the dry soul but Psalm 119 is especially good. It usually sticks out in people's minds because it is the longest of the psalms, 176 verses. It is actually the longest chapter in the Bible. It is ironic that the longest chapter in the Bible is on the Bible. Psalm 119 has one point—the perfection of God's word.

Here is how Psalm 119 works. It contains 22 eight-verse stanzas. Each stanza represents a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the eight lines in the stanza begins with that Hebrew letter. For example, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is *aleph* and so each of the eight lines of the first stanza begins with the letter *aleph*. The English translation does not begin with successive letters but instead is identified by the corresponding Hebrew letter at the beginning of each stanza.

Psalm 119 is quite amazing to behold and, honestly, intimidating to preach. The great 4th century pastor and scholar, Saint Augustine was asked why he had never preached Psalm 119 and he replied, "*As often as I began to reflect upon it, it always exceeded the utmost stretch of my powers. For in proportion it [seemed] more open, [but] so much the deeper [as I studied it]; so that I cannot show how deep it is.*"¹ If Augustine said this about Psalm 119, you can bet I approach the psalm with special care and concern.

The great Baptist Pastor and preacher, Charles Spurgeon called Psalm 119 the golden alphabet. His commentary on the Psalms called *The Treasury of David*, devoted 349 pages to Psalm 119 and was recently turned into its own book called: [*The Golden Alphabet: An Exposition of Psalm 119*](#). Essentially Psalm 119 is a poem that is on the delights of God's word from A to Z so that we may savor the delights of the word of God.

Another unique attribute of Psalm 119 is the use of synonyms for Scripture. Here are some of the more common synonyms: *law, word, rulings, ordinances, testimonies, commandments, decrees, statutes, precepts, charges, sayings, and promise*. As you read through Psalm 119 underline or circle each synonym.

We do not know who wrote Psalm 119. King David often gets credit but regardless of who wrote it he had a deep devotion to the word of God and the gift of poetry. One thing is clear, the author also understood the effects of the word of God on the sinner's heart, the sufferer's heart, and the saint's heart. When you read it, you will notice the heart is the target. This is especially clear in the first 88 verses.

Sometimes I feel like I am repeating myself when I preach. In the last two or three sermons in Luke's Gospel, Jesus kept telling His disciples to look back at the prophecies of the Old Testament and how they were

¹ Hywel R. Jones, *Psalm 119 for Life: Living Today in the Light of the Word*, 9. I added the brackets to help the congregation with the meaning of his statement.

all about Him. He kept saying: *it is written that the Messiah must die and rise again from the dead on the third day*. Jesus constantly pointed them to the accuracy of the word of God and the sufficiency of the word of God.

The message of Psalm 119 is the same message Jesus kept telling His disciples: God's word is perfect. It is without error. We can depend on it. We can build our lives on it. It is sufficient for every experience you can ever have in life. It is as my favorite hymn says:

*How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

I don't know if you are like me or not but have you ever gone through a difficult time, depended on the Lord and experienced the word of God and gotten through it and then just to have the suffering come again in a second wave. Have you ever experienced that? I know I have and it never fails that my thought will be, *Well, this will be my undoing. This second-wave of suffering will be where the other shoe drops and God leaves me to my sin and suffering. The Lord has just strung me on to let me wither on the vine and suffer and die right here*. Now, I understand that is a pretty hard thought to have but I have those thoughts sometimes. I have to fight them. I have to fight loneliness, darkness, feelings of abandonment and unworthiness. If you are like me you need assurance that God is not going to leave you all alone in your pain, your suffering, and your sin.

The first eleven stanzas of Psalm 119 are about the pilgrim's journey. It answers the question: The Lord has brought me safe to this point but will I now perish? The final eleven stanzas answer the question reminding us: *The Lord's word does not change in spite of all the evil in the world. The work that He has begun in me He will bring to completion by His perfect word.*²

Here is the main point of vv. 89-96: *We can rest on the firm foundation of God's eternal Word when it seems like our world is falling apart*. This text breaks down into two sections, vv. 89-92 and vv. 93-96.

I. The Redeemed Heart finds assurance in the Eternal Word of God in suffering (vv. 89-92)

⁸⁹ *"Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.*

⁹⁰ *Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.*

⁹¹ *By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants.*

⁹² *If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction."*

One of the characteristics about the Psalms is that many of them sound like personal reflections of the psalmist as he relates to God. However, we are in Book Five of the Psalms [Psalms 107-150].³ Book Five does not contain as many personal reflections as the other Psalms. Book 5 is primarily a call to worship and a call to doxology by remembering the word of God. Book Five is filled with songs of ascent that Jewish pilgrims would sing as they went to worship at the Temple during their festivals. It called them and it calls us to remember the word of God, the faithfulness of God, and the greatness of His steadfast love. Verses 89-96 *are written to remind the anxious sufferer of the firmness of the eternal word of God*.

² Joseph Francis Thrupp, 1860.

³ The Psalms breakdown into five distinct books that many scholars say correlate to the Pentateuch. Book Five, Psalms 107-150, correlates to Deuteronomy, the second giving of the Law. Deuteronomy's aim is on the word of God (the Law) and faithfulness in worship according to the word.

It is so relevant for us when we consider the world in which we live and the suffering we go through, no matter what the cause. Think of the events that are going on in the world today. Are you ever overwhelmed with all of the turmoil in the world today? I know I am. I listen to the news and hear reports of terrorism in our country with shootings in most any place where a crowd gathers. Last week was the 18th anniversary of 911 so that event is refreshed in our minds. North Korea and Iran are constantly threatening war. Iran's attacks on Saudi oil wells. Iran threatens to destabilize the whole middle east more than it already is. China's abuse of their own people, putting into prison millions of the *Uighurs* [wee-gr] people and arresting people in Hong Kong and imprisoning them because they want freedom.

In our own nation, the sexual revolutionaries are working hard to undermine traditional marriage and the understanding of gender. They are working hard to redefine what it means to be male and female. The 2015 Obergefell decision, whereby the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage is now ancient history for the sexual revolutionaries. Now they are seeking to remove the fact that we are born male and female. For the sexual revolutionaries, gender identity trumps religious freedom. In short, the sexual revolution of the 1960s is nothing compared to the day and age we are in now.

If these reports are not distressing enough, it is reported that 876 thousand babies were killed in the womb this past year. Abortion is no longer considered the killing of a baby but is touted as a woman's health issue and not murder of the innocent. In addition to this, sex trafficking of young boys and girls has now become the largest form of slavery on earth and it is on the rise. Time does not permit us to delve into the racism and prejudice of our day. Let me simply say our nation is a pressure cooker that seems like it is about to explode. Lone gunmen going into crowded places and opening fire on civilians or driving cars into crowds.

We live in the *biblical day and age* where people call evil good and good is called evil. It seems the very foundation of a civilized society seems to be crumbling and God's people are in the crosshairs of those standing in the way of "so-called" societal evolution/progress.

What are we to do when the very foundation of culture, society, and government erode? What do we do when every report seems to say there is terror on every side? What do we do when the pressure to call evil good and good evil is ramped up that we will suffer if we do not join in and declare they are right?

Think of the events going on in your personal life that cause you anxiety or worry: work, bad boss, perhaps you're the bad boss no one likes. Then there are family issues: marriage problems, in-laws, babies being born, discipline of your kids, someone else's kids, teenagers, school, college, and under all of these things are financial pressures. Finally, there are our own health problems. Our bodies are decaying. Our minds are getting weaker.

As I prepared this message I thought of how our parents began to decline just after we moved here in 2009. Not long after we moved here, my precious mother-in-law, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Then two months after we moved here my step-dad was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. This congestive heart failure was a final issue in a long list of issues that included cancer and four knee replacements. Sometimes it just seems like it is one thing after another. Some of us have lots of health issues when we are young and all of us have declining health as we age. Eventually, it results in death and that means we grieve and lament the loss of a wife, husband, child, mother, father, or an extended family member.

You may be asking, "*Michael, why go through a list of problems and afflictions like this?*" Because in our pilgrim's journey, we go from one affliction to the next and we long to set our hearts on a firm foundation. We long for God to take away the affliction and suffering and for His word to remove the worry and anxiety.

Notice what the psalmist does in a poetic fashion. He moved from broad to narrow application. He moved from how the word of God governs the cosmos, to the earth, to his own afflictions. He wants us to see that God's word governs the universe, the earth, and even the very smallest suffering in our lives. Here is one of the amazing attributes of power and presence of God—at very smallest point of every molecule and atom the fullness of God is there. There is not one particle where the presence of God is absent. There is not one pin-point where the fullness of the sovereignty of God dwells in the universe. You and I need to know this and believe it, and live in light of it. We need to be reminded of it over and over because no one is going to tell you this or remind you of this in life except God's word. The news outlets, pundits, philosophers, teachers, and any talking head is not telling you this. Only God's word will give you hope.

We need to be reminded that God did not wind the world up like a clock and then step back to let it run. His word actively, moment-by-moment, second-by-second governs everything that occurs in the universe. Every scientific fact that is true is governed by God. The fact that gravity works right now is by the very ordination of God's word. The word *fixed* in v. 89 means *God's word is on duty like a sentinel in a military outpost constantly working and upholding the purpose of the King*. God's word is not idle or asleep but is *living, active, and by His Holy Spirit*. God's word is a fortress of protection for God's people.

In v. 89, the psalmist is not calling us to set our hearts and minds on the heavens and the earth. He is calling us to set our hearts and minds on something more sure than the heavens and the earth—God's word. Assurance that comforts in suffering comes from the eternal word of God.

So, let me ask you: from where does your assurance in suffering come? From where does your comfort and rest come? In v. 92, the psalmist said that even though he was beaten, bruised, abused, and broken that had it not been for the eternal word, he would have *perished*. The word *perished* does mean simply dying. The psalmist was saying that not only would he have died but he would have left God and been lost. He is not saying he lost his salvation but he would have showed himself to have never been saved; to have never believed in God's word

Brothers and sisters delighting in God's word gives you assurance and comfort in suffering that you belong to God. Assurance is not found in walking an aisle, signing a card, reciting a prayer, being baptized, and becoming a member of a church. None of these things are bad but they do not give assurance—only delighting in the word of God gives assurance.

Why does delighting in God's word give you assurance? Because delighting in God's word is evidence of a redeemed heart [of salvation and that you belong to Jesus].

This is the first question you and I must answer when it comes to assurance of your salvation. Are you really saved? Evidence of genuine salvation is seen in the fact that we love God's word. If you examine your heart and realize that you have no love for God's word and you will have no assurance of your salvation. If this is you, then you must confess your unbelief to Christ. Call on God to save you by repenting of your sin of unbelief and by faith in Jesus alone hope only in Him.

The second type of assurance we need is as a child of God. God's children need assurance that when they are in the valley of the shadow of death, they will know the comfort and assurance of God's eternal word. We need the rod and your staff of God's word that corrects and guides us through the *dark night of soul* and deep depression (our affliction).

How does God's word give us assurance, comfort, and light in suffering? God's word is not mere words on a page but they are supernatural because they are filled with the Holy Spirit of God. The word of God and the Spirit of God are inseparable. God's word is breathed out by the Spirit of God.

We must turn to God's word. We must read it and like Jacob in the Old Testament, when he wrestled with God in the night and told Him, I will not let you go until you bless me. We must take God's word and even in our small understanding of it, grab it and wrestle with it and say to God, *"I will not let go of your word until you bless me with assurance. I will not stop reading, trusting, hoping, seeking, and knocking."* Friend if you have not been in the dark night of the soul that is in the valley of the shadow of death, you will. For at one time or another you will be there. Some of us will spend more time than others there and God's word will be our only light.

Sometimes as Christians, we are like Christian and Hopeful in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. We have been captured by the Giant Despair and thrown into the dungeon of Doubting Castle. The Giant Despair shows up every day and he beats us within an inch of our lives. He does all he can to beat any assurance and hope we have out of us. Do you remember what happened to Christian and Hopeful at the very point of their darkest despair? At that point, Christian finally remembered the key in the vest pocket over his heart. It was the promise of salvation. It was the gospel and he preached it to himself and Hopeful. The key of the promise of salvation unlocked the shackles and opened the door of the dungeon and they were free.

It is in those moments we remember the *Eternal Living Word of God* who is the embodiment of the *Eternal Written Word of God*. John 1:1-5 says:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

By faith, the psalmist looked into the written word of God and saw the eternal word of God—the Messiah. The One who was with God in the beginning. The One who perished on the cross for sinners to display the faithfulness of God in His covenant word.

Jesus told us in Matthew 5:17-18, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."*

How did He fulfill it so that we will have hope in our deepest darkness? He went through the darkness of death on the cross for sinners who had abandoned God. He was abandoned on the cross so that in our deepest darkness we would not be abandoned. Jesus died for sinners who turned their backs on God, and were enemies with God. The Son of God never abandoned God so that by faith in Him, we would never be abandoned by God.

So, what do you do when the dark night of the affliction of the soul rages? We must pray as the psalmist prayed in these verses. Can you pray vv. 89-92 into your heart or help someone who is struggling learn how to pray this passage? Let me show you how to do this . . .

II. The Redeemed Heart remembers the faithfulness of Eternal Word when we suffer (vv. 93-96)

⁹³ *"[Forever]⁴ I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.*

⁹⁴ *I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.*

⁹⁵ *The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies.*

⁴ The original Hebrew has the word *forever* here but can be translated *never*. The ESV decided to drop the word *forever* but we really need it here to show us the two sections of this stanza.

⁹⁶ *I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad."*

Verses 93-96 teach us that we must be continually reminded of what God's eternal word does. The fact is we tend to forget. We must be remembering to spend time in God's word by continually turning to the word of God. We come through the darkness one day but the darkness comes back the next and so we must return to the well of God's word for Living Water.

I don't know if you are like me but I am a list maker. I have a list of things to do and sometimes I treat God's word that way. I spend time in it and then check that off my list as if it is one and done. God's word does not work that way. It must be meditated up on and memorized. It must marinate and soak into the very fiber of our hearts and minds. So, we must take it in and digest it until it becomes part of who we are.

Look at what God's word accomplished in the psalmist's life. First, look back at v. 92, God's word *rescued* him. As he delighted in God's word *rescued* him from the destruction of abandoning God.

Second, in v. 93, God's word *renewed* him. It gave him life! After he came through his time of affliction, physically, he may have been weak but in his heart, he was *renewed*. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4 that Christians possess the treasure of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts that is in a body that is like a jar of clay that is wasting away because of our afflictions. And although the body is deteriorating in our hearts we are renewed in our inner man because the Spirit of God takes the word of God and renews us.

Third, in vv. 94-95, it *saved* him. For the psalmist, his affliction was wicked people persecuting him. Now that he had found assurance in the word of God and was *rescued* and *renewed* he was not worried about his enemies anymore. There was nothing that evil people could do to him. His heart was set in heaven with the Eternal Word of God. His gaze was fixed on the faithful word in v. 90, which means God's steadfast covenant love. On our side of the cross we see God's faithful word in Jesus who fulfilled the word of God as our substitute on the cross.

Finally, in v. 96, the psalmist looks around and says with King Solomon in Ecclesiastes, *"I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your [word] is exceedingly broad."* He is saying here, *I looked around and I saw what I thought was perfect until I rested on your holy word and now I see that Your perfections O' Lord go far beyond any limits. Your word is perfect. It is complete and it is finished.*

I don't know what you think is good or perfect in life but it has limits. Finances will dry up, health will decay, and strength will give way to weakness. You can work out all you want but you won't have biceps at 90. You might remember a verse of Scripture though. God's word will be the only treasure you can take to heaven so invest in it because that you can take with you.

Jesus said that all of the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms are about Him and that He came to fulfill the Law and the prophets and not do away with them. Jesus is the perfection, the completion, and the finished work of the word of God. He is the perfect reflection of the Living God. When you turn from your sin and to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, He rescues you, renews you, and saves you and He will not abandon you. He who began a good work in you will finish it.