

The Incomparable Word of God

Psalm 119:1-176

Introduction

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible consisting of 22 stanzas and 176 verses. It is an acrostic. As Alan Ross explains, “In each paragraph (strophe) of eight verses each line begins with the same letter of the Hebrews alphabet (The 22 strophes correspond to the 22 letters of the alphabet.) [*Psalms, BKC*, 879]. From verse 1 to verse 176 the anonymous psalmist meditates and reflects upon the incomparable Word of God. Interestingly it is last of the 150 psalms that Augustine expounded! Why? He said in his own words, “because as often as I began to reflect upon it, it always exceeded the utmost stretch of my powers.... I cannot show how deep it is” (*Exp. on the Fathers*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 8, 560). I believe anyone who mines the treasure of this psalm can readily identify with the great Church Father at this point.

- I. Stanza 1 (Aleeh): Those who walk in the law of the Lord are blameless and blessed 119:1-8

Psalm 119 begins like Psalm 1 on the theme of the “happy” or “blessed” (ESV) life. Blessed people are also “blameless” because they “walk according to the LORD’s instruction” (v.1). What is the key to this kind of life? They “seek [the

LORD] with all their heart” (v.2) and “praise [Him] with an upright heart” (v.7).

Who we are on the inside inevitably reveals itself on the outside. Jesus teaches us, “What comes out of a person defiles him. For from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts...evil actions” (Mark 7:21-22). Spurgeon is right, “God is not truly sought by the cold researches of the brain: we must seek him with the heart” (*TOD*, vol. 3, 142). Seek him with your heart, obey his word and enjoy the happy and blameless life.

II. Stanza 2 (Beth): Those who treasure God’s Word in their heart will live a life that pleases the LORD 119:9-16

Verse 11 is one of the most loved and memorized verses in all of the Bible. It teaches us that those who “treasure” God’s word in their heart will not live a life dominated by and enslaved to sin. Their life will be characterized by “purity” as they seek the Lord with all their heart (vs. 1-2). And, as they are taught by the LORD himself His Word (v. 12), they will testify (“proclaim”, v. 13) to the greatness of His Word and “rejoice” in it “as much as in all riches” (v.19). They will “delight in the LORD’S Word and never forget it (v. 16). Luther says of verse 11, “I have purposed to serve You with my whole heart. Therefore, I have imprinted Your words on my heart, so that I may no longer sin against them...” (*Luthers Works*, vol. 11, *Psalms 76-126*, 419). Here is not a person who is sinless. It is, however, a person who sins less.

III. Stanza 3 (Gimel): Those who look carefully into the Word of God will see wonderful things 119:17-24

That which is a treasure to the psalmist (v.11) now becomes “wondrous” (v.18).

Franz Delitzsch says, “The Tôra beneath the surface of its letter contains an abundance of such “wondrous things,” into which only eyes from which God has removed the covering of natural short-sightedness penetrates; hence the prayer in v. 18” (*Psalms*, Comm on the OT, vol. 5, 247). The psalmist needs this wondrous word because he is under attack from persons of influence (“princes,” v.23).

However, he is the LORD’s “servant” (vs. 17, 23). What his Master commands he will obey because the LORD’s “decrees are his delight and his counselors” (v. 23).

He will not see the advice of princes who “wander” from the LORD’s commandments (v. 21). He will not listen to the “arrogant” who are under God’s “curse” (v. 21). No, he will “think about [the LORD’s] statutes (v. 23) and “be continually overcome with longing for your judgments” (v. 20). He is following the path of the wise man of Psalm 1 and he will stay on this path.

IV. Stanza 4 (Daleth): Those who are experiencing troubles will find life and strength in the Word of God 119:25-32

The arrogant who insult and hold the psalmist in contempt (vs. 21-22) are wearing him down. He feels like “his life is down in the dust” (v. 25). He is “weary from

grief” (v. 28) and susceptible to “the way of deceit” (v. 29). Still, he is convinced that there is “life” through God’s Word and help as he “meditates on its “wonders” (v. 27). Therefore, the writer will “choose the way of truth” (v. 30) and “cling” to the LORD’s decrees (v. 31). His soul may “cling” to the dust (v. 25), but he will “cling” to the Word of God trusting that His Lord will strengthen him (v. 28) and not “put him to shame” (v. 31). God is faithful. He will minister to his heart (v. 32). He knows no matter what, the LORD is all he needs.

V. Stanza 5 (He): Those who allow the Lord to teach them His Word will obey
will live well and finish well 119:33-40

Verses 33-40 contain 8 petitions or prayer requests. Each is related to the Lord as the divine teacher. The psalmist wants to end well. Concerning the LORD’s word, he makes a pledge, “I will always keep them” (v. 33). Therefore he ask the LORD to “teach me” (v. 33), “help me understand” (v. 34), “help me stay on the path” (v. 35), “turn my heart to your decrees” (v. 36), “turn my eyes from looking at what is worthless” (v. 37), “confirm” (v. 38), “turn away disgrace” (v. 39) and “give me life” (v. 40). The psalmist could ask for no better teacher (God) and no better book (Scripture). We would be wise to follow his example. Therefore, we can live and finish well.

VI. Stanza 6 (Waw): Those who rest in the Lord's faithful love and keep his law will be ready to answer those who challenge them 119:41-48

First Peter 3:15 reminds us to be “ready at anytime to give a defense to anyone who ask [us] for a reason for the hope that is in us.” The psalmist wants to do this too, being ready to “answer the one who taunts me” (v.42). To do this he must rest in the LORD’s “faithful love” and “salvation” (v.41). He must “trust” the Word and “hope” only in it (vs.42-43). He must be a faithful witness in deed (v.44) and word (v.46). Because he is loved by God (v.41) he will love God’s Word (vs.47-48). Warren Wiersbe is right, “our lives speak for the Lord (vs. 44-45) if our “walk” agrees with our “talk” (*Bible Exp. Comm. OT Wisdom and Poetry*, 316).

VII. Stanza 7 (Zayin): Those who remember God's Word will be comforted by it 119:49-56

The psalmist is once again being harassed and hounded by his enemies. Even though he is the Lord’s servant (v. 49), “the arrogant constantly ridicule him” (v. 51). What is his course of action to be? “Remember!” LORD, you “remember Your Word to your servant” that gives me “hope and comfort” (vs. 49-50). In turn “I will remember Your judgements from long ago and find [more] comfort” (v. 52). Further, “I will remember Your name in the night LORD” (v. 55), perhaps a poetic way of speaking of those dark nights of discouragement in the soul, “a time

of dread and anxiety” (A.A. Anderson, *Psalms (73-150)*, NCBC, 824). Drawing near to His Lord for comfort (v. 50, 52), he will sing to the Lord (v. 54) and obey the Lord (vs. 55-56). Prayer, singing and obedience to the word will sustain him throughout his “earthly life” (v. 54). Willem VanGemeren is right, “This section is full of confidence in God and comfort to those who are waiting for his deliverance. Difficult as life may be, God’s word can help the suffering sing, even at night” (v.55) [*Psalms*, EBC, vol. 5, 869).

VIII. Stanza 8 (Heth): Those who run after the LORD will befriend all who also
fear Him 119:57-64

Trouble continues. The psalmist feels like “the ropes of the wicked are wrapped around him” (v. 61). Still, even though this is his experience, he will trust the Lord who is his “portion” (v. 57), his inheritance. He will keep the LORD’s Word even as he seeks God’s favor with all of his heart (vs. 57-58). He will reflect upon his life and repent if he needs to (v. 59). He will be quick to keep the Lord’s commands (v. 60), maintain a thankful heart (v. 62) and make friends with the right people (v. 63). The Lord’s “faithful love” is his, but it is such a great love that it fills the whole earth (v. 64). The psalmist longs for such a God to be his personal instructor and teacher (v. 64). Spurgeon is right, “Those who have God for their portion long to have him for their Teacher. Moreover, those who have resolved to obey are the most eager to be taught” (*TOD*, vol. 3, 258).

IX. Stanza 9 (Teth): Those who are afflicted by the discipline of the Lord will learn how good His instruction is 119:65-72

The word “good” dominates this stanza occurring six times in the Hebrew text and is translated “well” (v. 65), “good” (vs. 66, 68, 71) and “better” (v. 72). Amazingly the psalmist says, “It was good for me to be afflicted” (v. 71). Why? It kept him from an arrogant, hard and insensitive heart (vs. 69-70) and prepared him to learn from the Lord and receive His instruction (vs. 70-72). Such teaching is once more described as priceless. It is better “than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (v. 72). God’s Word is more valuable than anything this world can offer. This servant knows this. So did the quintessential “Servant of the LORD,” the Lord Jesus Christ. What a Savior! What an example!

X. Stanza 10 (Yodh): Those who receive comfort from the Lord’s faithful love will delight in His Word 119:73-80

The psalmist draws from the language of Psalm 139:13-15 acknowledging that the Lord “made me and formed me” (v. 73). Even as he is “afflicted” by the Lord who created him (v. 75), he can ask the Lord to do a number of things for him. Lord, “comfort me with your faithful love” (v. 76). Let me experience “Your compassion” in order “that I may live” (v. 77). “Let the arrogant be put to shame for slandering me with lies” (v. 78). In that light, “may my heart be blameless...so

that I will not be put to shame” (v. 80). All of this comes to pass as the Lord gives him understanding (v. 73), as he hopes in the Lord’s Word (v. 74), delights in the Lord’s instruction (v. 77), meditates on His precepts (v. 78), and gives proper regard to His statutes (v. 80). Once again we see the intimate relationship of the Lord’s love, comfort and word for the life of the believer.

XI. Stanza 11 (Kaph): Those who grow weary and discouraged should put their hope in the Lord’s salvation and His Word 119:81-88

The psalmist has been discouraged before, but in stanza Kaph it goes to a whole new level. He longs for salvation (v. 81). His eyes are weary looking for God to keep his promise and give him comfort (v. 82). He feels like his life is of little or no value (v. 83) and God is never going to answer his prayer (v. 84). His arrogant enemies have set traps for him (v. 85) and persecute him with lies (vs. 85-86). Indeed, they have almost ended his life (v. 87). Still, he will put his hope in the Lord’s word (v.81), never forget his statutes (v. 83) or abandon his precepts” (v. 87). In fact, because he is certain of God’s *hesed*, his “faithful love,” he will obey all that God has spoken (v. 88). The psalmist knows, as Robert Ketchum well says, “Your Father in heaven loves you too much to harm you, and He is too wise to make a mistake” (Quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exp. Comm: OT Wisdom and Poetry*, 322).

XII. Stanza 12 (Lamedh): Those who trust in the Lord's perfect and powerful Word delight in His teachings 119:89-96

Nothing compares to the Word of God. It is eternal and “firmly fixed in heaven” (v. 89). It gives life (v. 93) and “is without limit” (v. 96). It is given by a faithful God (v. 90) to whom all things are his servants (v. 91). Therefore, the songwriter will delight in this word (v. 92) and never forget it (v. 93). He will continually seek to know this Word (v. 94) and contemplate (carefully consider) it (v.95). He knows “the wicked hope to destroy him” (v. 95), but the life giving word will save him (v. 94). I like what Thomas Manton says of this stanza, “let us be much in hearing, reading, studying, and obeying this word, that makes us everlastingly happy! If the commandment be [“without limit”], why do we make no more use of it?” (*Psalms 119*, vol. 2, 308).

XIII. Stanza 13 (Mem): Those who love the Lord's instruction meditate on it all day long 119:97-104

Followers of Jesus must do more than read the Bible. They must meditate (vs. 97, 99) on it. They must love it (v. 97), keep it close by (v. 98) and obey it (v. 100). It will make them wiser than their enemies (v. 98), more insightful than their teachers (v. 99) and give them understanding that surpasses that of their elders (v. 100).

They will find that it will keep them from evil (vs. 101, 104) and that it is “sweeter than honey in our mouths” (v. 103). We should ask God to give us an appetite for his Word! Meditate on it and you will find it to be the sweetest thing you have ever tasted.

XIV. Stanza 14 (Nun): Those who keep the Lord’s righteous judgments find it to be a lamp for their feet and a light for their path 119:105-112

Verse 105 is one of the best known verses in the Bible; “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.” God’s Word guides us and directs us. It shows us where to walk and how to avoid danger. The wicked may set a trap (v. 110) and afflict us (v. 107), but the Bible will give us life (v. 107), lead us to praise (v. 108), teach us (v. 108), and give us joy (v. 111). Such a word should give us a resolve, a determination, to obey it “to the very end” (v. 112). Leopold is right, “He that uses it [the Word] faithfully learns where to set his foot as he walks along the slippery paths of this life. He need not stumble or fall” (Leopold, *Exp. of the Psalms*, 846).

XV. Stanza 15 (Samek): Those who reject the wicked trust in the Lord and love His Word 119:113-120

The psalmist has some tough words for his enemies in this stanza. He actually says he hates those he calls “the double-minded” (v. 113), “evil ones” (v. 115) and “the wicked on earth” (v. 119). Loving our enemies as Jesus teaches us in Matthew

5:43-44 does not mean we don't hate their cruelty, evil, treachery and wickedness. It is a delicate balance to be sure. That is why we must love the Lord's instruction and flee to him as our shelter and shield (vs. 113-114). We must put our hope in his Word, run from evil and obey His commands (vs. 114-115). We must look for sustaining strength only from God and His Word (vs. 116-117). We love His decrees, tremble in awe of Him and fear his judgements (vs. 119-120) knowing he "rejects all who stray" from his statutes because they are liars (v. 118). How very important it is for us to love the right things but also hate the right things. Both are essential to our spiritual health.

XVI. Stanza 16 (Ayin): Those who are servants of the Lord are marked by justice, righteousness and a love for God's Word 119:121-128

Three times in stanza Ayin we are called the Lord's servant (vs. 122, 124, 125). The word actually appears 14 times in Psalm 119. This is a wonderful reality when you consider that our Master is Jesus. And, because we have such a Wonderful Master we do "what is just and right" (v. 121). We look long and hard for the Lord's salvation and righteous promise (v. 123). We can ask the Lord to deal with us based on his faithful love, teach us his statutes and give us understanding (vs. 124-125). In response we will trust the Lord to act against those who break his law (v. 126), love his Word more than the purest gold, follow his every precept and "hate every false way" (vs. 126-128). Spurgeon is correct, "We who rejoice that

we are sons of God are by no means the less delighted to be his servants” (*TOD*, vol. 3, 369).

XVII. Stanza 17 (Pe): Those who find God’s Word wonderful weep over those who don’t 119:129-136

This stanza draws attention to the believer’s mouth, feet and eyes. With his mouth he pants, he wants more of something (v. 131). That something is the wonderful decrees of God (v. 129), a revelation that brings light and gives understanding (v. 130). With his feet the psalmist wants his steps to be steady so that he won’t let sin “dominate him” (v. 133). To accomplish this he asks God to “redeem him from human oppression” (v. 134), show his favor as the Lord’s servant and teach him His statutes (vs 134-135). Finally, with his eyes, he weeps because people do not love and obey God’s Word (v. 136). Some things should break our hearts and cause us to weep. Disregard for God’s Word is one of those things.

XVIII. Stanza 18 (Tsade): Those who are zealous for the righteous God acknowledge His righteousness is an everlasting righteousness 119:137-144

Righteousness is the dominate word of stanza *Tsade*. Some form occurs six times in the Hebrew text. The *CSB* renders the Hebrew word *tsedeq*, as “righteous, righteousness and just.” God always does what is right, correct, in harmony with his own holiness and justice. Because we are the servant (v. 140) of this righteous

God we love his Word which is completely pure (v. 140). We will not forget it (v. 141). Indeed, we will delight in it (v. 143), knowing it is essential to our life (v. 144). It will minister to us when our enemies come against us overtaking us with trouble and distress (v. 143). Alec Motyer is right, “Life’s adversities should drive us all the more to our Bibles...troubles should increase our delight in the Word whose life-giving power makes up our inadequacies” (*Psalms by the Day*, 357).

XIX. Stanza 19 (Qoph): Those who call on the Lord to save them will call on Him early and know He is near 119:145-152

The psalmist once more addresses the value of early morning prayers to the God who is near (v. 151). He will call on the Lord with all his heart (v. 145) asking the Lord to save him (v. 146) even as he obeys (vs. 145, 146). And when will he go to God in prayer? Before dawn (v. 147) and through each watch of the night” (v. 148). He knows the God who is near is a God of faithful love, a life giver and just (v. 149). Evil people may draw near to harm him but the Lord is also near and so he will be just fine! God has given His Word, and his Word is true, having been “established forever” (v. 152). Spurgeon puts it perfectly, “God is near and God is true, therefore his people are safe” (*TOD*, vol. 3, 403).

XX. Stanza 20 (Resh): Those who need to be rescued by the Lord will ask Him to be their champion as they love His Word 119:153-160

The psalmist again needs to be delivered. Three times he asks the Lord to “give me life” (vs. 154, 156, 159). He makes these requests because he is being “afflicted” (v. 153) and his “persecutors and foes are many” (v. 157). God, therefore must “consider” and “rescue” (v. 153), “defend” and “redeem” (v. 154). All that he asks from the Lord is tied to the fact he has “not forgotten” the Lord’s instruction (v. 153) and he loves the Lord’s Word (v. 158). The wicked may not seek God or obey His Word (vs. 155, 157, 158), but our songwriter will because “the entirety of God’s Word is truth and all His righteous judgments endure forever” (v. 160). Leupold notes, “The Word is one of the few things that continues unshaken and immovable through the ages. Happy the man whose life is built on that foundation!” (*Exp. of Psalms*, 857).

XXI. Stanza 21 (Sin and Shin): Those who are persecuted will fear, rejoice, love and praise the Lord for His Word that gives them abundant peace 119:161-168

The psalmist praises the LORD for the “abundant peace” (v. 165) he enjoys in spite of being persecuted by princes, leaders in the land, without a cause (v. 161). He can praise the LORD “seven times a day” (v. 164) because his heart only fears God’s Word (v. 161) and he loves it, something he declares three times in this stanza (vs. 163, 165, 167). The Lord’s Word is like a vast treasure (v. 162) with righteous judgments (v. 164). This Word will keep him from stumbling and instead give him salvation (vs. 165-166). He will gladly obey the Word knowing the LORD sees

everything he does (vs. 166-168). Trust and obey. Love and obey. These are beautiful companions as we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word.

XXII. Stanza 22 (Taw): Those who cry out to the Lord as their Shepherd can ask Him to help them according to his promise 119:169-176

The idea of the shepherd is present in the final stanza of Psalm 119 though the Word does not actually appear. You see the wandering lost sheep of verse 176 will not find its way home without the aid and help of its shepherd. This stanza is intensely personal as the psalmist prays to the LORD. He is desperate. “Let my cry reach you” (v. 169). “Let my plea reach you” (v. 170). “May your hand be ready to help me” (v. 173). “I long for your salvation, “LORD” (v. 174). “Let me live” (v. 175). “Seek your servant”, the lost wandering sheep (v. 176). In all of this our songwriter is confident that God will come through for him. His rescue will come according to the Lord’s promise. What could be more certain than that?!

Conclusion

Psalm 119 is the Word of God psalm. Twenty-two stanzas and 176 verses exalt and extol the beauty, perfection and power of Holy Scripture. It is a Golden Alphabet, that ends with what Michael Wilcox calls “the Wandering Sheep’s Charter.” Wandering sheep need a shepherd. The Bible again and again points us to one. He is the Lord our Shepherd (Psalm 23) the Good Shepherd (John 10), the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13)

and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5). This Shepherd will feed us and keep us by His powerful and potent Word. Delve into Psalm 119 and let the feast begin!