

Lamedh
Psalm 119:89-96
ABC 8/5/18

When the US Congress convenes each year, Senators & Representatives discuss on how to deal with the nation's social, financial, & political problems. Throughout the year, more & more laws are passed or amended. Our government's system of laws contrasts greatly with God's system of moral standards. Although the Bible records many regulations that no longer apply to us, it also gives universal truths that never change. As Ps 119:89 says, **Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven.** Everything God wants us to know & what He wants us to do has been clearly spelled out for us. & God's truth must not be amended, voted on, or vetoed. The Bible not only provides principles that stand forever, but it also gives delight (92), life (93), & protection (94-95) to those who read & obey it. Our politicians may be doing admirable work, but they can never give us anything as valuable as God's Word. & we can do no better than to live by God's settled & eternal Word. If you have your Bibles, open with me to Ps 119. We're going to be looking at vss 89-96 today. In vss 81-88 we came to the low point of the psalm, where the psalmist feels outmatched & hopeless, longing for salvation, & persecuted by his enemies. There's a sense in which today's & next week's portions see him come out of that pit & it's based upon his confidence in the Word of God. These sections are about the unfailing certainty of God's Word & how that helps us to live the life of faith. The enduring stability of God's Word & the faithfulness of His providence are our help at all times, including affliction & suffering. Vs 95 lets us know his circumstances & dangers haven't changed; that's not the reason this passage is so positive. At the center of his life & thinking, in the center of this stanza, in the center of this psalm, vss 92-93 show us that the key for him was his delight in God's Word as the only reason he survived his affliction. Let's read **89-96** & pray.

Ps 119 praises God for His Word because God has given us the Bible & it's only through it that we can come to know who God is & how to praise Him. No true Christian rejects the authority of Scripture. But all too often we place our experience alongside Scripture or use experience to interpret Scripture, rather than the other way round. If we truly believe that Scripture is the

divine breath of God, then it must shape our every thought, word, & deed. If anything, including our own perceptions, come into conflict with what's in the Word, then we must adapt our understanding, words, & actions to conform to it. 1st we see that Scripture is ...

1. Permanent (89-91) Up to this point, many of the stanzas of this Psalm begin by expressing the need of the writer, usually some plea for help, for teaching, or for life to continue. But this text begins not with a petition, but with praise. & there's really only one request in these 8 vss (94) & there are no requests in next week's section (97-104) which elevates the Word even higher. Hopefully, you remember that there were numerous questions in vss 81-88. **82, 84**

This week's passage focuses on the answer. After travelling through some low valleys emotionally, spiritually, & physically, this stanza ascends the pinnacle of Ps 119 as we cross the halfway mark of this psalm that's been called *the Mount Everest of the Psalms*. The transition to his fresh air at this higher altitude has been described this way:

After climbing up steeply though some very forbidding terrain the spiritually cramping muscles of the man of God have been pushed seemingly beyond their limit & are in desperate need of the kind of rest that only stable ground can provide. Some sure-footed territory is discovered by our psalmist on the firm high plateau of the Lamed & Mem stanzas. There he finds respectively both rest & refreshment prior to his taxing descent which will take him through yet more of life's crags, caves, & crevices.¹

The passage begins in the highest heights of heaven itself. **89**

The Psalmist praises God for the permanence of His Word in this opening statement. Regardless of what else may change in all the universe, God's Word remains firm (1 Pt 1:25). Like the heavens, it continually attests to God's unfailing power & unchanging care (Ps 89:2). The psalmist declares the Word of God isn't the words of men, but the very words of God. He believed the Scriptures come from heaven & not from earth. God's Word is eternal & does not change. Forever it remains. However unsettled our lives or minds may be here on earth, God's Word is settled forever in heaven. However unsettling the news of our day may be, God's truth is settled forever in heaven. It is unshakable in its almighty power. 1 Pt 1:22-25 says ...

you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living & enduring word of God. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, & ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER

¹ George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, p 217

OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, & THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” & this is the word which was preached to you.

The **living & enduring Word of God**, refers to the whole of written Scripture, Old & NTs. &, as Jesus says, **Heaven & earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away** (Mt 24:35). When we’re engaged with God’s Word, we’re engaged with that which lasts forever. **89**

Settled could be translated, *stands firm, firmly fixed, or stands secure*. Here on earth, politicians prevaricate, stocks slide, & economies erode, but God’s Word in heaven stands firm. It is settled securely, firmly. Whether you believe it or not, whether anyone believes it or not, if God has said it, that settles it. Someone may say, *I believe God is a God of love & I just can’t see how He could send people to hell who are nice & sincere but aren’t followers of Jesus*. But your belief or opinion on earth has no bearing on the fixed truth of God in heaven. This word for **settled** is often used in the OT for setting up a monument or pillar for generations to come. The language alludes *to the Word pictured as God’s eternal monument firmly foundationed in His own heavenly presence*.² Just as God is eternal, so is His revelation &, as vs 90 mentions, is His faithfulness (Ps 89:1–2; Mk 13:31). **90**

Here we see the power of God’s abiding Word moves from spiritual heaven (89) to physical earth where it is shown. There’s constancy & order in all of creation, reflecting the **faithfulness** of God (75, 86; 89:2; 104; 147:7–9). All God’s promises in Scripture will be fulfilled because God is **the faithful God** (Dt 7:9; cf. Hos 11:12), the **God of faithfulness** (Dt 32:4) whose every **work is done in faithfulness** (Ps 33:4). **His faithfulness is a shield & bulwark** to His people (Ps 91:4), causing them to exclaim, **Great is Your faithfulness** (Lam 3:23).³ God’s faithfulness is as eternal & everlasting as His very Word. The order in God’s creation reveals His love, care, & dependability. It was by God’s Word that the heavens were established (Ps 33:9), & it stands fast because of His faithfulness in sustaining them. Creation is a witness to the power of God’s Word, & generation after generation have that testimony because nature confirms God’s faithfulness. Gen 1 begins with God’s Word: & **God said...** (3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). How should this truth affect us? Ps

² Ibid, p 220

³ See also Ps 36:5; 40:10; 89:8; 100:5; 119:90; Rom 3:3; 1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Thes 5:24; 2 Thes 3:3; Heb 10:23; 1 Pt 4:19; 1 Jn 1:9

33:8-9 says, **Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, & it was done; He commanded, & it stood fast.** In Ps 93:1 we read, **The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The LORD has clothed & girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.** The laws that govern all creation are intrinsic because they exist by His **ordinances. 91**

The universe is firmly established by the Word of God which is also immovable, & His Word upholds all things. Heb 1:3 says Christ **upholds all things by the word of His power.** The outflowing of this is that **all things are His servants.** The whole of creation has God as its Maker & He established the principles on which it operates. Creation isn't to be worshipped as though it was divine, because all creation is a servant to do God's bidding. God is faithful & His Word can be trusted. The same Word that created the world (90) & runs the world (91) will also govern your life & make it secure.

I'm told when flying through clouds or fog, which obscures the horizon, pilots can't feel the plane's wings beginning to bank to the left or right. In fact in the early days of flight, pilots followed the myth of instinct: They believed they could feel the turn, & when their planes were engulfed in fog or clouds, many banked unknowingly into a spiral dive that ended in a crash. That's why one pilot writes, *Instinct is worse than useless in the clouds.* To fly through clouds, pilots must rely on instruments like the artificial horizon, a gyroscopically steadied line that stays level with the earth's surface & indicates when the wings are banking left or right. The artificial horizon revolutionized flying, but when it was 1st invented, pilots resisted using it. The biggest problem flyers had was belief. They trusted their feelings more than their instruments.⁴

We have that same problem. In the Christian life God's Word acts as our flight instrument. Our feelings can mislead us, but God's Word tells us the truth. The whole world will change but the permanence of the Word of God allows us to steady ourselves when everything else seems to be spinning out of control. I hope the reality of vss 89-91 thrills you like it did the writer. These works of God demonstrate the power of the Word of God. God's Word upholds & sustains the universe, His own faithfulness, & the living Word personified in the Lord Jesus Himself. The same Word that upholds & sustains the universe will uphold & sustain us through any affliction as we delight ourselves in it. As one hymn captures the truth illustrated here: *Summer & winter &*

⁴ William Langewiesche, "The Turn," *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec 1993, 115-22

*springtime & harvest, sun, moon & stars in their courses above join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy & love.*⁵

There's a lot of books in the world, but this is THE book. Its depth seems unapproachable & its demands are non-negotiable. It's settled & sufficient forever. It never needs to be made relevant. It is relevant! & the farther away we get from the Word of God, the more quickly we become irrelevant! The message of Scripture can never be improved. God's Word in the original is inspired, inerrant, infallible, & infinitely sufficient. It's immovable, immutable, irrefutable, & indisputable. It's unchanging, non-aging, & unfading. It's unalterable, unconquerable, unchangeable, & unassailable! That's the unbreakable, unshakable power & permanence of God's enduring Word. Scripture is permanent. It's also...

2. Precious (92-93) Our text last time ended with the prayer in vs 88, **revive me**. Here his prayer's been answered. Vs 93b says God's Word has revived him. Its reviving power comes in vs **92**.

The psalmist reflects on the encouragement & support that came to him from God's laws. By God's Word he's been preserved (88), & those statutes that he took delight in (24, 77, 143, 174) have been his stay in times of affliction. William Plumer says, *Such is the weight of many of our earthly sorrows that nothing but Scripture received in faith & applied by the Holy Ghost, can sustain the sinking heart.*⁶ There are sorrows that many of us face that nothing can help except the Word of God. Nothing else can produce joy in affliction like God through His Word can. We may not be able to delight in what's going on around us, but we can delight in what God says & this delight in His sufficiency keeps us from perishing in life's troubles. Alexander Wallace writes,

I happened to be standing in a grocer's shop one day in a large manufacturing town in the west of Scotland, when a poor, old, frail widow came in to make a few purchases. There never was, perhaps, in that town a more severe time of distress. Nearly every loom was stopped. Decent & respectable tradesmen who had seen better days, were obliged to subsist on public charity. So much money per day (but a trifle at most) was allowed to the really poor & deserving. The poor widow had received her daily pittance, & she had now come into the shop of the grocer to lay it out to the best advantage. She had but a few coppers in her withered hands. Carefully did she expend her little stock—a pennyworth of this & the other necessary of life nearly exhausted all she had. She came to the last penny, & with a singular expression of heroic contentment & cheerful resignation on her wrinkled face, she said, 'Now I must buy oil with this, that I may see to read

⁵ *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, Thomas O. Chisholm, #86 in our hymnal

*my Bible during these long dark nights, for it is my only comfort now when every other comfort has gone away.*⁷

In the book *Martyrs Mirror*, one imprisoned to die for his faith wrote a letter to his wife & son, which also models vs 92 as he was able to delight in Scripture to the very end.

*My dear wife, I cannot forbear to write ... to comfort & rejoice your heart, & this by the Word of God, for this must now be all our comfort, even as the psalmist says, O Lord, unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction (Ps 119:92). & as also the prophet Jeremiah says, thy word sustains us, since we have received it; & thy word is the joy & comfort of our hearts (Jer 15:15-16). Hence, my dear wife, we must have our delight in the word of the Lord, & meditate upon it day & night (Ps 1:2), even as a rich man has his delight in his treasure, meditates upon it, & often counts it to rejoice his heart.*⁸

As we learn & trust the Word of God, we're prepared to withstand whatever pain may come our way. In His Word God shows us the secret of suffering. He shows us Satan as our true enemy. He shows us what sin has done to ravish His earth. He shows us that He isn't distant from our sorrow, but in His Son He's a participant in it. He also shows us how suffering can become redemptive, & He gives us the certain hope that He will come & save us & heal us from all evil. To delight in God's Word is to delight in God Himself. **93**

This pledge is a repetition of one given several times already (16, 61, 83). **I will never forget your precepts.** To **forget** something implies disobedience. It's the psalmist's desire to obey God & His **precepts**. But **I will never forget** is a bold statement. **Never** is such a long time & rarely can we live up to making a claim to *never* or *always* do something. But the psalmist isn't relying on his own power for his faithfulness to God but on the very Word of God itself to sustain him & keep him pointed to the Word of God. This is because the psalmist knows that God's Word is the bringer & giver of life. **For by them You have revived me.** Scripture is the lifeline for spiritual reviving. Vs 50 says, **This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me.** Notice how he prayed for it desperately:

25 My soul cleaves to the dust; Revive me according to Your word.

37 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, & revive me in Your ways.

40 Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me through Your righteousness.

⁷ *The Bible & the Working Classes*, pp 215-216

⁸ Theileman J. Van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, p 1031-32

88 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness.

Do we pray like this? *Revive me by Your Word so that I may delight in Your Word. I don't love & long for Your Word like I should, revive me, enliven me.* We should & as we do so, God will give us life. Scripture is permanent, precious, & ...

3. Preserving 94

In Hebrew the emphasis here is on the psalmist's relationship with God: **I am Yours; save me.** In saying this:

- He recognized that God was his God
- He recognized that salvation was not in Himself
- He recognized that God hears & answers prayer
- He recognized that God would save him
- & He recognized God does so through His Word.

The author desires salvation & he's gone to where he knows it can be found, the Words of God. In His day he'd have known it as the Law. Today we can look at this verse from a slightly different perspective. Romans says salvation is found NOT in what we do, but is found only in faith in Jesus Christ alone. Salvation only comes through a personal relationship with Jesus. Trying harder, having our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, won't save us. Only God through Jesus' death & resurrection & our faith in Him saves us. In the classic NT text on the inspiration of God-breathed Scripture & how it's profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, & training in righteousness, Paul says right before that in 2 Tim 3:15, the **Scriptures which are able to make you wise to salvation.** One of the best illustrations of the saving power of Scripture comes from Phil Johnson writing about the 18th century preacher George Whitefield.

It's a true story about a man named Thorpe, who was a bitter opponent of everything that is holy. He & a group of his friends—all of them young, rebellious thugs—conspired together to mock & oppose George Whitefield's evangelistic ministry while Whitefield was preaching in Bristol, England. George Whitefield had severely crossed eyes ... & these guys used to refer to him as "Dr. Squintum." These hecklers called their little gang "The Hell-Fire Club," & they disrupted meetings, mocked Whitefield on the streets & in public places, & generally tried to make his ministry a reproach in their community. Whitefield's preaching had already made a deep & lasting impact in Bristol, & these young ruffians hated him for it. So this guy Thorpe got one of Whitefield's published sermons & took it to the local pub, where the "Hell-Fire Club" was gathered to drink together while they make a big joke out of Whitefield. Thorpe was apparently pretty good at doing impressions, & he had all Whitefield's mannerisms & gestures down pat. So he stood in the center of this pub & crossed his eyes & began to deliver a derisive rendition of Whitefield's sermon. But in the middle of the sermon, the Word of God pierced his heart, & he

suddenly stopped & sat down, trembling & broken-hearted. Right then & there, he confessed the truth of the gospel & gave his heart to Christ. His aim was to taunt & ridicule, but he accidentally converted himself! Or rather, the power of the Word of God penetrated his soul & cut him to the heart. He became preacher himself & quite an effective evangelist, because he knew so well the power of the Word of God to penetrate hardened hearts.⁹

Why do I stand up here & try to preach the Word of God, instead of trying to entertain you or flatter you or tell jokes or anything else? Because only **the word of God is living & active & sharper than any two-edged sword, & piercing as far as the division of soul & spirit, of both joints & marrow, & able to judge the thoughts & intentions of the heart** (Heb 4:12). To whatever degree a ministry or church departs from God's Word, the power of God also departs in the same measure. Look next at vs **95**.

His enemies are intent on his total destruction, but he trusts his Savior to deliver him. He knows what God's Word promises & he makes that his meditation. In other words, *while they wait to try to destroy me, I will rest in Your testimony that preserves me. The world wants to make me dead, but the Word makes me alive! It both saves & sustains me.* But notice again the poet isn't just doing nothing while requesting God's help. No, he's reading God's help. James Boice writes that when ...

... we get in trouble we usually go to God for help, which the writer did too. But we often stop at that point, expecting God to intervene all by Himself, miraculously, without any work on our part. The psalmist was wiser than we are, for while he prayed for help, he also did what he was able & obliged to do: He studied & meditated on the Bible. He knew that although it is God who must work, God nevertheless works through means, & in the matter of lifting us out of our trouble & setting our feet on a sure foundation, the only indispensable means of deliverance & growth is Bible study.¹⁰

2 Pt 2 calls for us to consider God's testimonies that He's revealed & see the preserving action of His Word:

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should **remember the words spoken** beforehand by the holy prophets & **the commandment of the Lord** & Savior spoken by your apostles.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, & saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that **by the word of God** the heavens existed long ago & the earth was formed out of water & by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with

⁹ www.gty.org/library/Print/Articles/A285

¹⁰ Boice, 3:1013

water. But **by His word** the present heavens & earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment & destruction of ungodly men (1-13).

Scoffers scoff at the promise of the Lord's return, arguing that because everything has remained the same since creation, God won't intervene in the world. These scoffers deliberately overlook the fact that God did intervene when He created the heavens & the earth with the Word of His mouth (Gen 1:3-31; Ps 33:6; Heb 11:3), & also when He judged the earth with water & it perished (Gen 6-9). It's the same powerful Word of God that creates & sends judgment. It preserves the current realm but by that same word, God will bring judgment. Scripture is permanent, precious, preserving, & finally ...

4. Perfect 96

As he looks around, the psalmist sees the limitations of earthly things, as everything fits within the boundaries that God has given them. This vs could well be a summary of Ecclesiastes, where every earthly enterprise has its day & comes to nothing, & where only in God & His commandments do we get beyond these frustrating limits. This vs could be translated *I have seen the consummation of all perfection or, I have seen the end to all (earthly) perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad, wide, & unlimited.* Even the most nearly perfect things in this world come to an end. **But Your commandment is exceedingly broad.** Despite all the great & beautiful things of this world, something is greater still: the commandment of God, His Word to us. It's not limited as the things of this world are. His Word is before creation, the sustainer of creation, & will endure beyond all creation. Only God & His Word are **exceedingly broad**, that is, unlimited & endless. His Word is so wide in its scope that it is immeasurable or limitless, & by implication, liberating. What fresh air we find when we discover the high ground of the stability & sufficiency of God's Word. Many think the Bible is narrow & constricting, but actually the Bible is exceedingly broad & freeing. God's truth sets us free. Many think of themselves as exceedingly broad-minded, yet show little tolerance for those who disagree with them. God's Word is **exceedingly broad** & it will make us broad-minded, broad-hearted, & tolerant in the best sense if we read & obey it. It will prevent us from being tyrants over others & to tolerate & love others even when their lives & thinking are decidedly against God & His Word. God's **commandment**

contains riches that can never be exhausted. God's law transcends all we can observe in creation. The Bible is complete & perfect in terms of providing everything we need. It's comprehensive. It's sufficient. It leaves nothing we need out.

What a wonderful picture of the sufficiency of God's Word! So broad & spacious is it that it encompasses all issues, all subjects, & all answers. We need nothing else & we must love it passionately, trust it implicitly, & obey it unconditionally. As we do, we'll experience more & more the reviving power of delighting in Scripture, a power that is joy-producing, life-giving, saving, sustaining, a perfect power for all of life. The more we learn of God's Word, the more we understand & appreciate God Himself & the more motivated we are to know Him better. God's Word is our foundation & is as certain as His own faithfulness. It is our sure & certain hope, & it is perfectly perfect! Let's pray.

COMMUNION

Just as God's written Word has come from heaven to earth, so has His living Word, His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. God's Word is all about His plan to save us from our sins through His Son's sacrifice in our place. He died the death we deserve so that we can experience the life He gives.

In Jn 6 we read,

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father & mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" 43Jesus answered & said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; & I will raise him up on the last day. 45"It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard & learned from the Father, comes to Me. 46"Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. 48"I am the bread of life. 49"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, & they died. 50"This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it & not die. 51"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; & the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh" (Jn 6:42-51).

Jesus, the living Word, the bread which came down from heaven to give His perfect, sinless life on your behalf. He died for you. We remember this through communion. **PRAY PASS**

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Mt 26:26).

We eat of the bread remembering our Savior who came from heaven to die in our place so His righteousness could be credited to our account.

When He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:27-28).

We drink of the cup remembering our Savior who came down from heaven & took on human flesh so He could shed His blood & die on the cross in our place. He rose 3 days later & offers us that abundant & eternal life.