

Nun
Psalm 119:105-112
ABC 8/19/18

As you know, for the night time journeys of Israel through the wilderness, they were illumined by a pillar of fire that moved before them on their march. During the day it was a pillar of cloud; but when they marched, it went before them to lead the way, & at night it lit their way as a flaming pillar of light (Ex 13:21–22). I have trouble wrapping my mind around that. So picture yourself holding a small lantern as you hike on an unfamiliar trail on a cloudy & moonless night. Your lamp only sheds enough light so you can take a step. But as you take that step, the light advances with you & you can see to take one more. So you move through the night focused on a small patch of light. In a similar way our travels through the dark & dangerous journey of this life is illumined by God's Word, as the 14th stanza of Ps 119 says when it begins: **105**

This is one of the great statements of Scripture about itself. The Bible has been given many tributes & descriptions. Thomas Guthrie said,

*The Bible is an armory of heavenly weapons, a laboratory of infallible medicines, a mine of exhaustless wealth. It is a guidebook for every road, a chart for every sea, a medicine for every malady, & a balm for every wound. Rob us of our Bible & our sky has lost its sun.*¹

The Bible within its own pages refers to itself by various images:

- James compares the Word of God to a **mirror** (1:23)
- Eph 6:17 & Heb 4:12 call it a **sword**
- God says in Jer 23:29, **Is not My word like a fire ... & like a hammer which shatters a rock?**
- Heb 5:12-14 compare it to milk
- 1 Cor 3:1-2 liken it to solid food
- Peter calls it seed that is sown (1 Pt 1:23)
- Author of Hebrews calls it an **anchor for our soul** (6:18-19)
- Ps 119 has already compared it to **riches** (14), **treasure** (72), & **honey** (103)

Today we see God's Word as a **light & lamp** (105). We've all experienced being in a cave or room of total darkness & then having even one match lit. This idea is used spiritually in Scripture of God's Word as the only thing that can bring light into darkness. The prayer of vs 107 should be our prayer: **Revive us, O Lord, according to Your Word.** *Sola Scriptura*, the Reformation principle of Scripture Alone, meaning the Bible is sufficient for salvation & all of life & godliness, isn't

¹ Cited by Woodrow Kroll, *Ephesians*, p 79

something the Reformers made up. It's the message of Ps 119 from start to finish. Vss 105-112 are God's Word for us this morning: **105-112** PRAY

1. Scripture is Our Light 105

In the past 2 sections (89-104), the psalmist has been rejoicing at the pinnacle of this psalm with the knowledge that God's Word is eternal & from heaven (89). He loves God's law & meditates on it continually (97). Now he begins his descent on the other side of his journey through dark & dangerous paths which vs 105 alludes to but is made clear in 107 where he says, **I am exceedingly afflicted**. In vs 109 he says his very **life is continually in his hand**, & vs 110 says there are enemies all around trying to capture him. In dark & difficult times the torch of God's law lights up our path & reveals to us the dangerous places where not to step & illumines the path & where we should step. Here vs 105 has been compared to ...

a grappling hook that is securely anchored on that high plateau of stability & sufficiency (89-104), but at the same time, attached to it is the first length of fragile cord for the disciple's dangerous descent downwards. In vs 105 God's Word ... is regarded as both a focused (105a) & a diffused light source (105b). As a "lamp" it is like a flashlight's beam aimed at the next step of one's feet on life's dark path. As "light," it is like a floodlight which penetrates the murky shadows surrounding the meandering highway ahead.²

On the highway of life, Scripture is both our low & high beams. The imagery has been summed up this way:

When an ancient traveler journeyed at night he carried an oil lamp with him. As he walked along, swinging the lamp out in front of him, he could see the rocks & ruts directly ahead of him in the road, & he could avoid them. Sometimes he actually strapped a small clay lamp to his ankle & it illuminated the path before him, one step at a time, as he walked.

That is how God uses His Word to guide us. He does not promise a brilliant blaze of light to illuminate the road for miles ahead. He promises a lamp to our feet, enough light for the next step ... The headlights on our automobiles do not expose the dangers a mile or so ahead. They merely divulge the next bend in the road.

God knows that it may not be best for us to see too far down the highway of our lives. If He showed us the whole plan at the outset, we might decide that we do not want to follow it. It might involve more sacrifices than we are willing to make at this stage of our spiritual maturity, or it might look too difficult for us to handle at this point in our spiritual growth ... If we run ahead of the light to see what lies beyond the next step, we shall find ourselves in the dark again.³

² George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, pp 247-248

³ R. L. Strauss, *How to Really Know the Will of God*, pp 167-170

God's Word is a step-by-step light. It's not enough to have it, we must use it & follow it every step of the way as we go. The Bible should help us walk the way God wants us to walk. Think of all the different words we use to describe how a person walks: stroll, saunter, trudge, plod, dawdle, hike, tramp, tromp, slog, stomp, march, stride, wander, ramble, tread, prowl, roam, traipse, mosey, meander, & perambulate. The different words show there are many different ways to walk & each of them says something. How are we to walk? Here & in 1 Jn 1:7 we're told to **walk in the Light**. That's not possible without the Word of God lighting our way. We're not to concentrate on our feet, the path, or the dropp-offs next to us. We're to constantly focus on the **light** of God's Word as He shows us where to place each foot. If we believe the promises of God in His Word we know if we keep focused on that patch of light & keep putting one foot in front of the other, we'll come to **prove what the will of God is, that which is good & acceptable & perfect** (Rom 12:2). No matter how thick & threatening the darkness may seem, we know the darkness can never extinguish the light (2 Cor 4:6; Eph 5:8; 1 Jn 1:5). The author of this Psalm undoubtedly knew the 1st words recorded of God were, **Let there be light** (Gen 1:3). This is God's specialty, light from darkness, & this is what God's Word continues to do. His written Word brings light to life's darkness in our everyday lives. Our love for God & His Word is best shown by the we live it, by the way we listen to it, by the way we walk according to it. Just as the Israelites wandering in the wilderness had to follow the pillar of fire, we must follow God's light as revealed in His Word. We must trust & follow it every moment of every day.

Prov 6:23 – **the commandment is a lamp & the teaching is light; & reproofs for discipline are the way of life**

In Jn 8:12 Jesus says, **I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.**

2 Pt 1:19 – **We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place ...**

& in 2 Sam 22:29 God Himself is described as our **lamp. You are my lamp, O LORD; & the LORD illumines my darkness.**

God through His Word gives a light that far surpasses any human lamp. As one pastor said it:

The Bible is a reading lamp, with which we can read the very thoughts of God. It is a miner's lamp, which illumines the darkest places in the pit but also reveals the gems that are buried

there. It is a safety lamp, which, like the one used by miners many years ago that prevented the lamp flame from igniting dangerous gases, protects us from the dangers lurking unseen around us. It is the lighthouse lamp, which lights the shore & reveals the rocks of ruin that await. It is a hurricane lamp, which ... can never be blown out no matter how strong the wind. It is a street lamp, which illumines the shadows of the night & reveals enemies that hide there. & it is the hand lamp ...simple flashlight, that we can easily carry & point ...⁴

Think of times you've walked in the darkness without a lamp or light. While walking in your home in the night, ever hit your shin on a coffee table, step on Legos or a chewed Nyla-bone? A **light** not only shows us where to walk but where not to walk. It provides both direction & protection. Our job is to stay on the path of obedience. We live in a dark, perplexing world that offers us many paths. If we're careless about the ones we choose, we invite misery & ruin. The Word of God provides the direction we desperately need. Many Christians think this means the Bible exists to give them detailed instructions concerning what job to take, whom to marry, & other details of daily living. This isn't how God's Word functions. It doesn't offer special or mystical leadings. It unfolds the kind of character a Christian should have & shows the priorities that should govern our thinking. This is true light on our path & it is only the Bible that provides it. Nothing in the world gives the same illumination. What's the appropriate response to the light-giving truth of God? **106**

He's bound & determined to keep God's righteous judgments. *I swear to keep the truth, the whole truth, & nothing but the truth, so help me God.* Yet, as we've seen & will continue to see, he knows he can't keep God's Word without God's help. He's resolved to keep God's **righteous ordinances**. He's made a commitment to stay on the path of blessing & will treasure God's Word because it keeps him on this path. He has absolute confidence in the outcome because he knows, like Paul, that **faithful is He who calls you, & He also will bring it to pass** (1 Thes 5:24). Yet resolve is a thing that's vulnerable to dissolving, especially over time. You can start out intending to do something, & years & struggle after struggle later, your resolve weakens. Hearing the vow again can help strengthen that resolve. & seeing other people take the vow & keep the vow strengthens your resolve. One of the great stories of Christianity is of Thomas Cranmer going to the stake because he refused to deny the doctrines of Scripture. But if you know the whole story,

⁴ Dr. J. D. Watson, www.thescripturealone.com/home/sermon/gods-word-provides-guidance/

before he finally refused to deny the doctrines of the Bible, he had signed a statement saying, *I deny what I have been teaching. I accept the teachings of the Catholic Church.* But then he watched 2 of his colleagues be burned at the stake because they'd refused to sign the same document that had been given to him. Know what this did for him? It was what God's Spirit used to strengthen his resolve & he recanted his recanting. He said to his captors, *I'd like you to bring that statement that I signed back to me because I'd like to tear it up.* They said, *You understand what that means? That means you'll be burned at the stake.* He understood. Watching friends of his be willing to die for the truth strengthened his own resolve. & you remember how he died? As they lit the flames, he stuck his right hand in the flames 1st & said, *You betrayed me. You burn first.*⁵ So the resolve of vows & seeing others resolve in vows can be a great encouragement to the Christian life. We should start each day by re-committing ourselves to God & His Word. Scripture is our **light**. It's also ...

2. Scripture is Our Strength 107

The word **afflicted** has appeared several times already (50, 67, 71, 75, 92, 107, 153), but this is the only time he adds the word **exceedingly** to it. The afflictions in the Christian life don't disappear as we mature, they often increase, but God also gives increased strength to deal with them as we rely on Him for life & cry out **revive me**. This is a prayer to be given life, to live, to be alive, to thrive spiritually, & to be revived spiritually. When God revives us it is always **according to His Word** (107b). In his suffering the author turned to God's Word & found God present. It was God's presence & God's promises that kept him going. Jay Adams writes:

*In a time when one is falling, he grabs whatever is at hand. If the Word of God is not uppermost in his mind at such moments, he will grab for something else. That is why he must meditate on the Word day & night – throughout the whole day. That is why he must store up God's Word in his heart. If he does so faithfully, his normal, habitual response will be to "grab" for the promises of God when he senses he is beginning to fall.*⁶

The worst thing you can do in the midst of suffering is close off from other believers & God's Word. The Holy Spirit guides our minds & comforts our hearts through God's Word. The psalmist moves from praying for revival to praising God. **108**

⁵ As told by Ligon Duncan, www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/psalm-119-not-by-bread-alone-your-word-is-a-lamp-to-my-feet/

⁶ *Counsel from Psalm 119*, p 91

Freewill offerings were the Israelites voluntary offerings, given in addition to their tithes & taxes to support the priests & government. This offering wasn't mandatory but was to be given willingly, voluntarily, & bountifully. As I understand what the NT teaches about giving, this is the key principle. We give to the Lord not because of some legal requirement of OT law, but lovingly from our hearts. The amount is between you & God & is none of my business. (I don't know what anyone in the church gives except myself & don't want to!) Our giving is to be from the heart, generously, not grudgingly, motivated by love not legalism or law. Here the poet uses a term for **offering** but he adds **of my mouth**. He's talking about the praise of his lips that he offers to God. This is his voluntary worship, which he does because he wants to not because someone told him he has to.

He then moves from his mouth praising God to God's mouth teaching him. He prays yet again **teach me**, a phrase we've seen many times in this Psalm already (12, 26, 33, 64, 68) & will see 3 more times before we finish (124, 135, 171). Praising God with our mouth & being taught by God belong together. Praise & teaching is what we're to be about as a church. When we come to church we should be taught what God says in His Word. God has spoken in the Bible & it's there that He continues to speak to us. There's nothing more important for our growth & health as individuals & as a church than praising God & hearing His Word read, taught, & explained.

Spurgeon well wrote, *These repeated cries for teaching show the humility of the man of God, & also discover to us our own need of similar instruction. Our judgment needs educating till it knows, agrees with, & acts upon, the judgments of the Lord.*⁷

109

This is a bold statement of spiritual aggressiveness saying, *God, You give me enough light for one more step. In the Word, I have everything I need. I have made a commitment to stick with Your plan until the end. Now I am ready to take my life in my hands & go to battle!* He's taking his our life in his hands meaning he's in constant danger. The Jewish Targum or Tanakh (paraphrases, explanations, & expansions of the Jewish Scriptures) paraphrases this Hebrew idiom as, *I am constantly exposed to danger*. Jesus said **take up your cross** (Lk 9:23) & called us

⁷ *Treasury of David*, www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-108.html

to be willing to give up all things, including our lives. *The man who carries his life in his hand, should carry the law in his heart.*⁸ His life may be in danger, but if you look at the 2nd half of vs 109, he understands his greater danger is forgetting God's Word. James Montgomery Boice asks:

*Do we understand the danger of abandoning God's Word? I do not think so, & the fact I would put into evidence is the nature of our prayers. The prayers I hear have to do almost exclusively with having good health (or getting better when we or someone else is sick), succeeding at our jobs, passing a test ... Where are the prayers that we might be kept from sin, that we or those close to us might become more godly, that we might be able to live better for God or get to know God better? We need the Bible to clarify our true danger.*⁹

In vs 109 he uses the word **continually** to speak of his danger, a constant & perpetual precarious state. But he didn't become so wrapped up in his troubles, so concerned about his life that he forgot everything else. Instead, recognizing he was continually in a vulnerable position drove him to God's law. Like all that we've been saying throughout this study of Ps 119, trouble, risk, sickness, persecution – whatever difficulties come into a Christian's life – ought to make him think all the more of the Bible & its promises & cause him to turn to the Bible for God's help in times of crisis.¹⁰ Vs 110 certainly was written in an hour of crisis. **110**

Ungodly people will also set snares for us because they hate us & the Lord we're serving. This trap was a snare for birds or other small creatures. They were camouflaged & baited. The hidden hunter would wait for his prey. The writer uses this analogy because he feels his enemies want to trap him like an animal. Spurgeon says he ...

...was not snared, for he kept his eyes open, & kept near his God. He was not entrapped & robbed for he followed the King's highway of holiness, where God secures safety to every traveller. He did not err from the right, & he was not deterred from following it, because he referred to the Lord for guidance, & obtained it. I

*f we err from the precepts, we part with the promises; if we get away from God's presence, we wander into the wilds where the fowlers freely spread their nets. From this vs let us learn to be on our guard, for we, too, have enemies both crafty & wicked... By keeping to the ways of the Lord we shall escape the snares of our adversaries, for His ways are safe & free from treachery.*¹¹

The psalmist is determined to concentrate not on the wicked, but on God's Word. He doesn't try to defend himself or to retaliate but stays focused on the Word & entrusts himself to God. The 2nd half of the vs is key: he stayed with God's Word to avoid the traps & temptations of his enemies.

⁸ W. Graham Scroggie, *Psalms*, p 184

⁹ *Psalm 107-150*, pp 1028-1029

¹⁰ Jay Adams, pp 92-93

¹¹ *Treasury of David*, www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-110.html

Jesus modeled this masterfully in Mt 4 brandishing the sword, **it is written**. We need supernatural strength for supernatural life & it's found in this supernatural book, the sword of Scripture. It says of Apollos in the book of Acts, he was **mighty in the Scriptures** (18:24). God tells Joshua **be strong & very courageous**. How? **Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you** (Josh 1:7). Paul says in Eph 6, **Be strong in the Lord & in the strength of His might** (10). & how do we appropriate this supernatural strength? He concludes: **take up the Sword ... the Word of God** (17).

Kent Hughes points out:

If Christ, the Divine Man, in battling Satan while here on earth did so with the sword of the Word, how much more do we frail men & women need to wield that same sword if we are to be victorious? ... Face the truth – we are at war, & our razor-sharp weapon is God's Word, & we are fools to keep it in the scabbard simply because our culture says it cannot cut ... How much better it is to obey God ... How do we do this?

First, by reading it. It is amazing that a Christian can imagine that he or she can live a Christian life without regularly reading the Bible, for that is impossible! Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again & again ...

Second, we take up the sword by meditating on it. This is the secret of God's warriors (Ps 1:1-3).

*Third, the sword is grasped for effective battle through memorization ... Let us grip the sword firmly through diligent study! ... Now we must reach out our hand & **Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God** & raise it to Him in worshipful salute ... Soldiers of Christ arise & put your armor on!¹²*

The writer of Ps 119 knew as well as anyone that it is in Scripture where we find our source of supernatural light & strength for life. Finally...

3. Scripture is Our Joy 111

What is the psalmist's spiritual heritage? What is he looking toward & working for? Some heavenly reward? A word of praise from God? No, his heritage is what he's been speaking about all along, God's Word itself. & it brings him joy. Strength & joy in life go naturally together. In fact, in Neh 8:10 it says **the joy of the Lord is your strength**. Ps 119:92 puts it this way, **If Your law had not been my delight, Then I would have perished in my affliction**. His affections of joyful delight gave him strength in his affliction. What's his inheritance? The treasures of earth can have moth or rust destroy or thieves break in & steal, but treasures in heaven & from heaven endure forever (Mt 6:19-20). The Word of our God abides forever & it gives us abiding joy. When

¹² Ephesians, p 237ff

he says God's statutes are his **inheritance ... forever** he's saying that God Himself is his heritage. He said it earlier when he said, **The Lord is my portion** (57). There's nothing better than God, so he doesn't look for anything better. William Plumer says this: *The greatest error of most who profess the true religion ...* How do you think he completes that? *The greatest error of most who profess the true religion is that they do not make enough of it.*¹³ In other words, they don't feel that God's testimonies are their heritage forever & that they are the joy of their heart. They don't take their deepest delight in the heritage promised them by God in His Word. But notice though emotions come & go, the poet isn't passive but must pursue as well. **112**

To **incline** is to stretch out, to extend yourself & press to the finish. The author is concentrating every fiber of his being on driving forward, pressing on to the absolute end. Why? Because the Word of God makes it all worthwhile. He's saying, *my heart has joy in Your Word ... but I must cultivate my joy by being in Scripture & obeying it.* I hope you don't think this writer's love, joy, & delight in God's Word just magically happened without effort or prayer. His love & joy were a conscious decision. Ps 119:16 says, **I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.** Vs 47 puts it this way: **I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love.** Also, notice how often his statements of delight include prayers. Vs 35, **Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it.** Vs 77, **May Your compassion come to me that I may live, For Your law is my delight.** His personal responsibility & resolve is always reliant on God but still active. If God is at work in us, we will work hard as well by His strength (Eph 3:10). The end of vs 112 is the psalmist's pledge to obey Scripture. **Forever, even to the end.** We all want to finish well, don't we? The word **end** can refer to reward as well. Our chief end is to glorify God & to enjoy Him forever. That's our resolve as well as our reward, our duty as well as our delight. The joy of vs 111 is essential. Even of Jesus Himself it says, **for the joy set before Him endured the cross** (Heb 12:2). He did so not because He enjoyed the pain of beatings, thorns, nails, & the wrath of God upon Him as our sin-bearer. No, He **endured the cross for the joy set before Him.** There's great joy, Lk 15 says, in the presence of the angels in heaven, when a sinner repents. God Himself is

¹³ *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, p 1067

rejoicing in heaven before the angels with great delight when salvation takes place. The joy of God is pictured in the joy the father of the Prodigal Son has when his repentant son comes home.

As Charles Bridge writes,

*Many, indeed, are satisfied with far too low a standard of spiritual enjoyments. It is comfortless to live at a distance from our Father's house, when we might be dwelling in the secret of His presence, & rejoicing in the smiles of His love. But let us not charge this dishonourable state upon God. Let us rather trace it to its true source—our lack of desire ... of faith ... of prayer ... of diligence. What infinite need have we of heavenly influence! What gracious encouragement to seek it! The way was blocked up—mercy has cleared the path, opened our access—**The golden sceptre is always held out** (Esther 5:2). Earnest prayer will bring a sure answer. The blessing is unspeakable.¹⁴*

Seeking satisfaction & happiness isn't our problem. As I mentioned last week, CS Lewis said our problem is we're far too easily pleased with cheap substitutes. We're like the prodigal son, eating slop & wallowing with the swine, when if we'd just come to our Father, His arms are open wide & a joyful feast is ready. In other words, as Isaiah 55:2-3 says, **Why do you spend money for what is not bread, & your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, & eat what is good, & delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear & come to Me. Listen, that you may live.** There's delight in listening to the Lord & hearing Him in His Word. We find true satisfaction, life-giving joy, & sustaining nourishment for our souls when our heart is inclined & our will has bowed humbly before God. Isaiah 55 goes on speaking of the abundant mercy & great joy that accompanies the repentant who seeks God's Word. **Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way & the unrighteous man his thoughts; & let him return to the LORD, & He will have compassion on him, & to our God, For He will abundantly pardon...** (6-7). Then we read,

For as the rain & the snow come down from heaven, & do not return there without watering the earth & making it bear & sprout, & furnishing seed to the sower & bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, & without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. For you will go out with joy & be led forth with peace; The mountains & the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, & all the trees of the field will clap their hands (10-12).

God's Word doesn't return void. & I pray & trust that it isn't going forth this morning without accomplishing the purpose God desires. One of those purposes is your joy, your delight, & your

¹⁴ Charles Bridges, *Psalm 119*, <http://gracegems.org/26/bridges5.htm>

rejoicing in God & His Word. If Jesus isn't yet your Lord, I pray you'll seek Him as your only satisfaction & portion. Leave the empty passing pleasures of sin, & pursue eternal glories & delights in Christ. Call to Him in humble faith & enter into the joy of your Master in whose presence is the fullness of joy. There's great joy in heaven when sinners repent & turn to Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross for you. As you put your faith in & receive Him today, you glorify God & begin to enjoy Him forever. If you already know the Lord, delight yourself in Him. God is glorified in you when you're rejoicing & delighting in Him. Serve the Lord with gladness. & seek to be a joy to others, for the glory of our God, & for our good. But keep in mind that every step is dangerous. This is why we must look to God & His Word for the lamp for our feet & the light for our path. With every step dangerous, we can endure forever, to the very end, because the same God who lights & sustains us for one step can do it for every step, to the very end. Close with what Willard Johnson wrote of Scripture:

Generations follow generations—yet it (Scripture) lives.

Nations rise & fall—yet it lives.

Kings, dictators, presidents come & go—yet it lives.

Torn, condemned, burned—yet it lives.

Doubted, suspected, criticized—yet it lives.

Damned by atheists—yet it lives.

Exaggerated by fanatics—yet it lives.

Misconstrued & misstated—yet it lives.

Its inspiration denied—yet it lives.

Yet it lives—a lamp to our feet,

a light to our paths,

a standard for childhood,

a guide for youth,

a comfort for the aged,

food for the hungry,

water for the thirsty,

rest for the weary,

light for the heathen,

salvation for the sinner,

grace for the Christian.

To know it is to love it;

To love it is to accept it;

To accept it means life eternal.¹⁵

¹⁵ Hobbs, H. H., *My Favorite Illustrations*, pp 20–21