

THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WORD IN THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD
PSALM 119:105-112

We live in a dark world. We live in a world where people are blind to the reality of God, the devastation of sin, the truth of Christ and His righteousness. We live in a world where blind people tell seeing people that those with sight can't see. We live in a world where Satan has blinded the minds and hearts of the unbelieving so they cannot see the light of truth. We live in a world where believers, too, get ensnared by the darkness and fall prey to the wiles of Satan. He devours them by making them blind to the truth. We live in a world where our great Enemy would not only blind us, but he would destroy us. We live in a world where the Bible is increasingly deemed irrelevant. We live in a *church* world where the Bible is deemed irrelevant.

A number of years ago I was granted a sabbatical by the church and one of my goals was to visit various churches to get a sense of what was being done in the "average" church. At one prominent local church, the pastor read Hebrews 12:1-3 (a magnificent passage) at the beginning of his sermon, and then he walked to the back of the stage, closed his Bible, set it on a lectern, and then returned to the center of the stage and never picked up or used his Bible again. It was a perfect picture for what that church really believes about the Bible — it tells "inspiring" (motivational) stories, but "what *we* say is more relevant."

In this dark world and in a church world where the Bible is increasingly diminished, where will we turn for help and hope? For 40 years, Grace Bible Church has turned to the Bible, but is the Bible still adequate for the next 10 years, never mind the next 40 years? How will we survive in this dark world?

This morning, we are going to consider the second of three great themes we are considering in our journey to our anniversary Sunday — grace, God's Word (the Bible), and the church. This morning, through the Psalmist's great song of Scripture — Psalm 119:105-112, we will be reminded to,

BE FAITHFUL TO GOD'S FAITHFUL WORD.

In this stanza, we will see God's faithfulness to us in His Word. And we will also see four times (circumstances) to remain faithful to God and His Word:

1. When You Have **MORAL** Questions, Be Faithful to God's Word (vv. 105-106)
2. When You Have Circumstantial **TRIALS**, Be Faithful to God's Word (vv. 107-108)
3. When You Have Relational **PERSECUTION**, Be Faithful to God's Word (vv. 109-110)
4. When You Have God's **INHERITANCE**, Be Faithful to God's Word (vv. 111-112)

1. When You Have **MORAL** Questions, Be Faithful to God's Word (vv. 105-106)

- Verse 105 may be one of the most well-known verses in this psalm. It is often understood and explained as providing direction and guidance for life decisions and choices we make daily.
 - ✓ It is true that Scripture provides direction for making choices (that's another topic for another sermon), but that's not what is in view in this verse.
 - ✓ Here, the psalmist emphasizes that the Word of God provides light for pathways. And he obviously is suggesting that the reason one is using a lamp or light is because the pathway is *dark*. There are things on the pathway of life that cause one to stumble or be ensnared. The Bible keeps us out moral traps and moral failures (v. 110).
 - ✓ Notice that the lamp's light is for *feet*. Actually, the word is singular — “foot” — and not plural. The sense is that the light of the lamp is adequate for *each* foot and where each foot is placed. The light exposes any impediments that might make walking difficult or lead one astray. Scripture is adequate to address every circumstance where the foot might travel; nothing is beyond its scope.
 - ✓ The light is also given on the *path* — Scripture often speaks of a path as a course of life (Prov. 1:15; 3:17; 8:20; 12:28); and Scripture provides the light to keep us on the right path and to not deviate to the wrong path. Note that this also has a “personal” emphasis — my feet and my path; this is not so much to correct the moral failures of the culture but to help me navigate through temptations that are attractive to me. It reveals *my* heart and *my* inclinations and hopefulness for *me*.
- What does Scripture do to reveal moral dangers in life?
 - ✓ It serves as a *lamp*. The lamp spoken of here is a small clay dish, pinched at one end to hold a wick, and filled with olive oil. The lamp would fit in the palm of one's hand. It would provide the same amount of light as a candle. It was just enough to see the immediate pathway in front of one.
 - ✓ It serves as a *light* — this is a broader, more penetrating light; rather than a candle, this is a floodlight that permeates an entire area/region. This is more like the light that guided the Israelites through the wilderness (Ex. 40:36-38).
 - ✓ Scripture shines as a light on that which is dark and black and false; we live in a dark world (Col. 1:13; 1 Pt. 2:9) — the darkness we were called out of still surrounds us and attempts to influence us). Scripture exposes sin and points one to the path that leads to life, as did Christ (Jn. 1:5; 3:19; 8:12).
 - ✓ The power of the Word is that it reveals the darkness of the world for what it is. Only the Scriptures can guide us through the maze of confusion that the world has made of morality and truth.
 - ✓ Our privilege as a church is to stand for the truth; that is our fundamental role (1 Tim. 3:15). We want to point each other to the truth, and we want to give hope to the world for the true way to live.

- Because the Word of God reveals moral truth, how does the psalmist respond (v. 106)?
 - ✓ Because the Scriptures guide *me* through moral decisions, notice the personal response:
 - ***I have sworn*** = This is a pledge and an oath to do what is right. It pictures standing before a judge and calling God as a witness to the oath you are taking: “as God is my witness...”
 - ***I will confirm it*** means something like, “my statement stands.” His commitment is resolute. He is unwavering. These two phrases are synonymous and probably should be taken as one idea: “I have given an unwavering promise/oath.”
 - Then notice what he is committed to — ***I will keep Your righteous ordinances***. His commitment is to obedience. He is resolved to follow God’s ***righteous*** standard. (That God’s judgments and evaluations are righteous is a way of affirming that God’s Word is faithful to God. We can trust and lean on God’s Word — it will never lead us astray.)
 - The Psalmist needs teaching and understanding (which he frequently asks for in this Psalm), but he also needs to obey and follow and do. And that’s what he does.
 - ✓ Let me draw two implications from this:
 - *The psalmist is living a purposeful life*. He is intentional with his actions. No one is accidentally holy. People are holy because they are intent on using the gifts God has given them to be holy. What is my intention? What am I doing to not only say I will obey God, but what am I doing to help myself obey God? (I need to let the Word tell me about me every day, and then obey it.)
 - *The Word of God is given to change us* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Let it do its work. Making a vow does not make us holy. Holiness is the result of hearing and heeding the Word of God. Holiness is a result of obeying what we learn — so read and learn and then do what it says by the Spirit’s power (which is what Romans 8 was all about).

2. When You Have Circumstantial **TRIALS**, Be Faithful to God’s Word (vv. 107-108)

- Our needs are not merely for the moral questions that surround us; our needs are also for the difficult personal circumstances of our lives.
 - ✓ The psalmist says ***I am exceedingly afflicted***. He has repeatedly spoken about his suffering in this world (vv. 42, 61, 67, 71, 75, 82-83, 110). He is not specific in this verse how he is suffering.
 - ✓ His emphasis in this verse is how extensively he is suffering. He is “bowed down” under heavy afflictions. He is weighed down, overwhelmed, overburdened.
 - ✓ There is suffering in this world and it is unjust, and it is hard. We need comfort and help.
 - ✓ I pulled up my file of suffering and saw articles about: a quadruple amputee, dementia, birth defects, cancer, depression, war, Ebola, untimely death, blindness...
 - ✓ To be alive is to suffer. Trials are normal and trials are pervasive (Rom. 8:19ff; 1 Pt. 4:12).

- The question is not *whether* we will suffer, but where we will turn when we suffer.
 - ✓ The temptation is to ignore or attempt to run away from suffering and difficulty (e.g., Zedekiah's response to Jeremiah in **Jer. 38:24ff**). We desire to make life easy and we implement many different strategies to avoid suffering (including compromising our beliefs, which is the warning of Hebrews).
 - ✓ But the psalmist refuses to avoid his suffering or compromise in his suffering.
 - ✓ **Revive me, O Lord** = "Bring me to life." He says this 9x in this psalm (the only 9x it is used in the OT — vv. 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159. These verses tell us two things:
 - Life comes from God, and it comes through (by means of) **His Word**. He is dependent on God. If he will live, it will be by the hand and provision of God.
 - This request also tells us that we have recourse with God. We can go to Him and ask Him for help when we are suffering. He is compassionate and cares (**Mt. 7:11**).
 - ✓ The psalmist not only asks for help — he also praises and gives thanks — **accept the freewill offerings of my mouth** (**v. 108**). There were a number of offerings in the OT that were mandatory, but there were some that were "free will" — non-prescribed. One could be obedient without giving them. Here the psalmist says he gives a free (non-compelled) offering from his mouth — these are praises and thanksgiving that are "unrequired."
 - In the midst of his trials, he not only will not curse God, but he praises God and affirms His goodness.
 - When I was a child, my parents drilled into me the necessity of saying, "Thank you." Gratitude for Christmas presents is fine, but learning to say thank you for a dinner of liver? It's hard.
 - The psalmist is also clear that he wants God to be pleased with and **accept** (and not reject) this verbal testimony. He wants the words of his lips to please the Lord (**Ps. 19:14**).
 - Are you careful with what you are thinking and saying when you are suffering? Does the "self-talk" you do honor the Lord and give Him an acceptable offering? (N.B. He hears the self-talk.)
 - Undoubtedly because giving praise and gratitude is hard, the psalmist also says, **teach me**... In fact, 13x in this psalm he uses this word — he needs instruction. He knows he needs to give thanks, and because it is difficult he knows he needs to grow in understanding to do it.
 - Perhaps our suffering us being used to teach our brothers — "have you considered Job...?"
- Notice how the psalmist demonstrated faithfulness in these verses:
 - ✓ He *prayed* — "I need help"
 - ✓ He *praised* — "You are good"
 - ✓ He *petitioned* — "teach me"
 - ✓ In all three actions, he is saying, "My life is hard, but I will turn to God and not reject him. When my circumstances are heavy, I will turn to the only faithful One and His Word, who can sustain me."
 - ✓ Friends, when life is hard, our temptation is to put down our Bibles and close our prayer journals. When life is hard, we are tempted to question, complain, and even curse God. If God is your Savior, He is not your enemy; He is your friend. Be faithful to Him. Where else would you go (**Jn. 6:68**)?

3. When You Have Relational PERSECUTION, Be Faithful to God's Word (vv. 109-110)

- Not all our troubles are the normal kinds of things that happen in this world: illness, death,... Sometimes our troubles are because people want to do us harm, as the psalmist notes:
 - ✓ ***My life is continually in my hand*** — the sense is something like, “I try to hold onto my life, and I am not strong enough to maintain it — my life keeps wanting to slip from my hand.” It is a phrase that indicates that the psalmist is always aware that he is perpetually at risk; his life is always in danger, and even in grave danger. He is ***continually*** on the precipice of great suffering or death.
 - ✓ He says that because of the trouble he faces in v. 110 — ***the wicked have laid a snare for me***.
 - Here he uses a hunting image — a hunter sets a trap that when the bird flies into it, will close around him and trap him so he cannot escape. It's hopeless.
 - The point is not so much that he is trapped, but that someone is intentionally doing harm to him. He is not just suffering in this world like everyone else, but someone is out to get him.
 - These are ***wicked people*** — they are against God and against God's people (vv. 61, 95, 155).
 - We live in a world where there are not only many kinds of traps that will ensnare us, but there are people who are against us and not only want to see us fall, but are working for our failure.
 - The psalmist is vague about who these people are, but sometimes they will be people who are close to us — our attackers may be people who know us and should love us (parents, children, spouses, intimate friends...). The wicked people may come from our most intimate relationships (Prov. 6:19). If we are more dependent on those relationships than we are on God, then we will be particularly devastated. But the psalmist does not appear destroyed.
 - ✓ It is notable that in these verses the psalmist does not seem angered about the attacks against him. He is merely reporting them: “this is the condition of my life — affliction and persecution.”
- The psalmist is not overwhelmed by his persecution, but he still turns to God:
 - ✓ ***I do not forget Your law*** = the temptation is to forget or ignore God's commands. He is resolute, intentional, purposeful to remember and meditate on what God has said.
 - “The man who carries his life in his hand should carry the law in his heart.” [Scroggie]
 - I don't remember many individual sentences from seminary, but I remember one chapel when the school president said, “Never give up in the dark what God has revealed in the light.” He said that because in the darkness of temptation and despair, it is tempting to forget God. Be purposeful to remember and be purposeful to expose yourself to the truth.
 - This is one of the good reasons for regular reading of the Bible and regular worship and fellowship. If you read the Bible every day, then every day you are reminding yourself, “I need to tell myself the truth.” When we don't have the habit of regular intake of Scripture (or worship or fellowship), we have removed a primary stimulant to remember God.

- ✓ He also affirms, ***I have not gone astray from Your precepts***. He has not wandered or drifted away.
 - Notice something significant in this verse — the trap has been set by his enemies, but if he is entrapped, it is because *he* has gone astray. It is not the circumstances of his life, or his enemies, or the temptations of the world that make him apostatize. It is his own heart and desires that are his ultimate trouble.
 - “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.” (“Come, Thou Fount...”)
 - That is the nature of the flesh — it pulls us away from God. So if we will not leave the Lord, then we must affirm, commit, be resolute, fight, and lean on the Spirit and the Spirit’s Word.
 - It is the ***precepts*** of God that will keep us from wandering from God. His precepts are His instructions — His life manual — and they are sufficient to keep us from destroying ourselves.
 - I think often of Demas — who loved the world and left Christ (2 Tim. 4:10); had he loved Christ, he would have left the world behind (Phil. 3:12-14).
- ✓ The psalmist’s response to his persecution is so helpful for us; he persisted with God while he was persecuted because he faithfully fed himself on God’s Word and faithfully followed that Word. God has given instructions and he followed them.
- ✓ That is also our pathway to faithfulness. We don’t need less persecution. We need more resoluteness to learn, submit to, and obey the Scriptures. For 40 years, that has been our joy as we have watched one another be faithful to God. And for 40 years, it has been our sorrow to watch people drift away from the faith. There is no greater joy than seeing spiritual children walking in the truth and there is no greater heartache than seeing them walk away from the truth.

4. When You Have God’s **INHERITANCE**, Be Faithful to God’s Word (vv. 111-112)

- There is one more thing that the psalmist says he has, but this time it’s not a difficulty, but a blessing.
 - ✓ When he says, ***I have inherited Your testimonies forever***, he uses a term for inheritance that is often used about the covenantal relationship between God and Israel (Ex. 32:13). But it is also used in Lev. 18:20ff — the Levites don’t receive a land inheritance, because God is their inheritance.
 - ✓ Here, the psalmist says something similar — he has ***inherited*** God’s ***testimonies***. He has a title deed to an inheritance that is supremely valuable — the Scriptures.
 - ✓ Whatever else he had that was troublesome in this world, he had the sufficiency of God’s Word as his ultimate treasure. It is valuable, because to have the Word of God is to have the mind of God and fellowship with God. If He has given us His Word, He has given us Himself.

- So the psalmist understandably says, **they are the joy of my heart**. He is jubilant for Scripture.
 - ✓ Notice again that he is purposeful in his action; he doesn't wait to become happy with Scripture, but he intentionally cultivates joy in Scripture. He makes himself happy in God and His Word.
 - ✓ This is his regular response throughout this psalm (vv. 11, 14, 72, 127, 162).
 - ✓ Do you take in the Word of God in such a way that you learn to enjoy it and delight in it?
 - ✓ I remember the first time I ate Mexican food; I suppose I was about 8-9 years old. I kind of liked the chips, and I liked the sopapillas, but the rest of it just seemed bitter and painful to me. Why would anyone like Mexican food? How times have changed. Now I get regular comments and requests for my salsa — and Mexican food is a staple in our home; when I order a sandwich at Subway, I say, “lots of jalapenos — no *lots* — hurt me.” How did that change? I needed a regular diet of Mexican food and I needed to stimulate my taste buds to it. The same is true of Scripture. If the Bible is not your joy, it is likely because you have never fed yourself a consistent diet of good Bible reading and you have not read it in order to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

- In the last verse, one more time, the psalmist indicates his intentionality to be faithful to the Scriptures.
 - ✓ ***I have inclined my heart...*** means he is directing and commanding his heart to be obedient. He is not waiting to see where his heart will naturally go. He is commanding himself to act in particular ways and to desire particular truths.
 - ✓ The word “incline” has the idea of bending something — so he is forcing his heart to go in a particular direction. He wants God to bend his heart this way (v. 36). He is also purposeful to move his heart in this direction (v. 157).
 - ✓ His new direction is a bent to ***performing Your statutes*** — what God has decreed, he does.
 - ✓ What God has decreed, he does ***forever, even to the end***. He obeys into eternity, and to the “end” of eternity. He is committed to unceasingly obeying God.
 - ✓ What is interesting about this word ***end*** is that it is translated in Ps. 19:12 as “reward” — there is a great end (“reward”) for those who keep the Word of God. In keeping the Word of God to the end of his life, he will experience a great end. The same is true of us who remain faithful to God.
 - ✓ Do not grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:8-9). There is a great end for those who follow God and Christ to the end. When there are problems and persecutions, trials and traumas, keep looking past the end of this world to the end of the great reward promised by God and His Word.
 - ✓ His Word demonstrates His faithfulness; be faithful to His faithful Word.

CONCLUSION: One commentator said of this psalm, “Knowing the value of God’s law as the [moral] guide of life, the Psalmist is resolved to keep it, whatever may be the risk.” [Kirkpatrick]

As we think about God’s past faithfulness to us as individuals and as a church, that statement fits for us as well. As we look to the future — to the next 10, 20, 40 years, that statement fits us as well. Where else will we go for direction, guidance, and wisdom? Will we turn to Oprah? Or the Avengers? Or Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram? What about Wikipedia? Will we turn to Joel Osteen? Or the church growth movement? Or postmodern wisdom? Will we turn to political leaders, social justice, or judicial reform? Will we look to Fox News, CNN, the *Wall Street Journal*, or the *New York Times*’ bestseller list? Will we turn to intellectuals like Stephen Hawking or Marilyn vos Savant (highest recorded IQ)?

We are committed to the unfolding of the Word of God.

Even more than teaching, discipling, and counseling with the Scriptures, we are committed to *doing* the Word of God. Faithfulness to the Scriptures is not just faithfulness to teaching and hearing the Scriptures.

Faithfulness to the Scriptures is bound up in *doing* the Word of God. One of the highest commendations given in Scripture is what Paul said of the Thessalonians — “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” (1 Thess. 2:13) Further, it is notable that Psalm 119 doesn’t just expound the power, authority, and wisdom of Scripture; it also expounds the wisdom of faithful responses to Scripture. This psalm teaches that appropriate responses to the Bible include:

- Awe of
- Behold/look upon/see
- Believe in
- Cling to
- Comforted by
- Consider
- Counsel with
- Delight in
- Esteem
- Hate false ways
- Inclined my heart
- Keep
- Learn/know
- Long for
- Love
- Meditate on
- Do not forget
- Do not forsake
- Do not go astray from
- Do not turn from
- Observe/obey
- Praise/worship
- Regard
- Rejoice/my joy
- Remember
- Run after/with
- Seek
- Sing
- Speak, tell/told
- Give thanks
- Treasure
- Trust
- Turn to
- Wait for/long for
- Zealous for

And this stanza reminds us that this is our commitment. Because God’s Word is *His* Word and it is faithful, we are resolved to do it. Are *you* resolved? What is your commitment to hear and *heed* the Scriptures?

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25