

How to Handle the Future

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Psalm 119

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This morning as you're being seated, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to Psalm chapter 119. As you're turning somewhat in the middle of your Bible, Psalm 119, today we're actually going to begin in verse 105. If you are a guest, if you're a visitor with us or maybe you haven't worshiped with us in some while, I want to welcome you to a very strategic journey through the longest chapter of the Bible. That's right, Psalm 119 has 176 verses divided into 22 what we might call subsections with one overarching theme, the importance of God's word in our life. Now why is it, particularly if you're a guest, we would be doing such? Well, there's two really quick reasons. The first one is this, you may not be aware of it, but we as a church body, we are challenging ourselves this year to put the whole scripture, the whole Bible to memory. Now we're not doing this with one person or somebody striving to do the whole thing, we've actually reserved a chapter per person in our goal of attaining this. But secondly, each and every week when we gather in Psalm 119, we're discovering that there's an aspect in our life, a practical day-to-day aspect in our life, that the word of God alone is capable and able to address, and today, particularly for those of us who are what we might call adults, this may be a subject matter that we struggle with the most, it's the future. Whether it be tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, or that which will follow you in days and years and decades ahead, if there's one thing that we tend to be anxious about, desirous about, and lose sleep about, it's what is or what is not going to occur in the days ahead. So how do you and I properly navigate? How do we handle the days that have yet befallen us? Well, in Psalm 119 verse 105 today, we have a guide in doing so. It says,

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. 106 I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments. 107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word. 108 Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments. 109 My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law. 110 The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts. 111 Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. 112 I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.

Now as we walk through Psalm 119 section by section, week by week, one of the things I think sometimes we forget is the name of the book of the Bible we're in, Psalms. That's kind of a Bible word for a song. That being said, you know, oftentimes we listen to music, listen to songs that have a variety of verses and one of the things you'll notice today is that the first half of this section is actually repeated in the second half. In other words, verses 105 through 108 are basically reiterated in verses 109 through 112 and so what we're going to do today is look at these four aspects that the word of God addresses in regards to our future as an attitude and an action, and what we're going to see is it kind of sets our life with the right frame of reference in the first half and gives us a course of action for the second.

So the first aspect in regards to our future is it says there is a certain resource which we have at our disposal in regards to our future days. Without question, verse 105, one of the salient verses in the Bible says that our attitude is that the word of God, the Bible, should be a lamp to our life, a light into our path. Now that's a beautiful verse. It's one of which oftentimes we print, we frame in our house, but there's one overarching struggle with that verse, last time I checked, if you are walking down a path of life and all you have is a meager lamp, it doesn't provide a whole lot of light, does it? In fact, one of the things that I wish this verse said, I wish it said, "Thy word will light up all the rest of the days of my life so I can see what's coming down the road." That's not what it says. It says it is a lamp to our life, a light unto our path. In other words, what Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, he said, when you pray, pray, "God give us this day our daily bread." You know, I wish it said, give us this week, give us this month, give us this year, give us this decade, and maybe here at the beginning, maybe the most difficult part of this passage today is realizing that God is never going to show you all of it but he's never going to leave you in the dark. It says that thy word, it's a lamp unto my feet, it is a light, under my path, so when we talk about our, quote, future days, we must be of the attitude and the understanding that God is not going to show us or give us more than he desires to do so, and where we often err is we, quote, project into the darkness beyond the light and can we just go ahead and concur, rarely, if ever, do we know more or even close as much as God does about the days that are ahead.

That is the attitude. So what's the action? Notice what it says in verse 109, "My soul is continually in my hand." In other words, because of this, there is a trustworthiness, there is a security that says I not only believe in but I trust that God knows what he's doing. Let me remind you, in the gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, we see the miracles of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the sermons of Jesus, we see the death of Jesus, we see the resurrection of Jesus, and right before his ascension, you know what he says to those men? Last verse, Matthew 28, "I will not leave thee and I will not forsake thee." Now, I'm not asking for a raising of hands, I'm not asking for a verbal amen, but I know, after living life the length that I have, that there are days where you look past that brief diameter of light in front of you, maybe it's a week down the road, maybe it's a month down the road, maybe it's a year down the road, and you begin to question, "God, are you sure you've got this? You sure that you're gonna take care of me because I can't see past right now. And I've heard some rumors and I've heard some chattering," what does it say? "I will not leave you. I will not leave you. forsake you." And the thing that we have to

grasp and understand is the resource that we have for the days ahead of us is not public opinion, it's not the latest ideas but the word of God as we just heard in song has been shown to be true from time beginning till the time of which what we know as time eventually ends so that necessitates that you and I must be resolved on this matter.

Notice verse 106, "I have sworn and I will perform it." Now, many of us, I don't know if all of us, have either been personally involved in or have at least witnessed from a distance an opportunity where someone is, quote, sworn into court. What does somebody do? They say, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help me God." You really know what they really mean is, "I swear to tell the truth unless the truth's gonna get me in trouble and then I'm just gonna lie about it." That's really what most people say. But nonetheless, when we say, "I swear I will perform it," that is an attitude, that is a resolve that says, "to the best of my ability, this is what I desire to do."

You know, it reminds me of the story in the book of Nehemiah chapter 10. I don't expect it to be a familiar chapter to you. Do you know why? Nehemiah chapter 10 is one of those chapters in the Bible that begins, listen to this, it begins with 82 names. I mean, it's just a list of names but what's important about chapter 10 is it follows chapter 9. You say, "What happens in chapter 9?" The Israelites, they've just come out of the Babylonian captivity. Think about this. For 70 years, they were in Babylon. Why were they in Babylon? Because they rejected the word of God. They did not allow it to be a lamp under their feet. They did not allow it to be a light unto their path. Rather than listening to Isaiah and Jeremiah, they listened to the media and the reporters. Did you hear me? Rather than listening to Isaiah and Jeremiah, they listened to anybody and everybody else. They go into captivity. Jeremiah said, "It's not going to be too long, 70 years, and you're coming back." Nehemiah begins to rebuild that wall. They rebuild the temple. Ezra establishes the worship. In chapter 9 of the book of Nehemiah, it is a revival of all revivals. He stands up. He reads the scriptures for three hours. They confess their sins for three hours. Have you ever paused to think, what did they do in Babylon, it took three hours to tell it all. Unbelievable worship service. Then in chapter 10, there's a list of 82 names. Seems somewhat just kind of a weird change of gears there until you get to verse 29. You know what it says? It says, "And we commit to doing it the way God told us to. We will follow his law." And it says they signed their name on the dotted line. Let me give you a contemporary parallel, at least contemporary according to biblical history. In the year 1776, there was a man by the name of John Hancock. What did he say? He said, "I'm gonna sign my name so big, the King of England can see it from there." That is the attitude of being resolved, that I am so committed, I've got both feet in, nothing will stray me, nothing will keep me from doing it exactly as God told me to.

Now that's the attitude. Here's the action. Notice what it says in verse 109 at the end, "yet do I forget not thy law." You know, the Israelites in Joshua chapter 1, after they come out of captivity in Egypt for all those years, for 400 plus years of bondage through the Red Sea, through what we know as the wilderness experience, remember what the Lord said? "As you go into the Promised Land, don't forget what I told you. Do it exactly the way I told you." It's amazing to me how many of us on Sunday have the attitude of resolve, but on Monday forget to actually put it into place. And what I mean by that, it's easy today, I

mean it's easy in this environment with the music, with the fellowship to say, "Yes, I'm going to do it God's way." You know what's tough? It's tomorrow morning when the alarm clock goes off and you are faced with that which you never dreamed would occur or happen in your life.

I mentioned Nehemiah chapter 10 earlier. I'm going to go back to that passage because there's something that takes place in there that you may have never noticed or never read. 82 people plus a bunch of priests said, "Yep, our name's on the dotted line. We're going to do it the way God told us to." Then you go to verse 30. You know what they said? They said, "Because we are so committed to doing it God's way, trusting our soul in him, we will not buy, we will not sell, we will not do any commerce on the Sabbath day. We'll dedicate an entire day of the week to the Lord." Now, why is this a critical, important illustration when it comes to resolve? I don't know if you've noticed, but when we talk about the, quote, future, there are millions of people right now that are losing their mind over tomorrow. For those of you who have not had access to any kind of media the last six months, there's a solar eclipse. People are losing their minds. You know what we're hearing? "Oh, this is proof of God's judgment. This is it. God is trying to tell us that judgment is coming." I've got news for you, you're Johnny Come Lately. Say, "What do you mean?" Now, I'm about to show my age, some of y'all about to laugh. I remember a day where we had Blue Laws. You know who's laughing right now? People with gray hair or no hair. Some of you are thinking, "What's a Blue Law?" I remember as a child that when church ended at noon, or 12:15 depending on how long the preacher went, there weren't restaurants to go to, there weren't stores to shop in and there were not ball games to attend or watch. You know, it's funny today that everybody is losing their mind about what's going to happen about noon tomorrow, but over the last 70 years, we have just slowly said, you know, we don't need to do it God's way anymore. We're just going to do it our way because it's more beneficial, it's more profitable, it's more this, it's more that. So understand, when we talk about this resolve to do it God's way, it does not and it will not make sense to the quote, dark world that is beyond the lamp of his light.

Can I give you a reality check? If today you say in a few moments, "You know what, pastor, you're right. I've done it the world's way too long. It's time to do it God's way." Let me give you a little dose of reality here. Notice what it says in verse 107, "I am afflicted. very much." You know, one of the great false understandings today is what we call the prosperity gospel. You say, "What's the prosperity gospel?" It's this belief that somehow if you do it God's way, you're going to be healthy and you're going to be wealthy. You know what the problem with that is? It may sound good to your ears, but it doesn't match the Bible. In fact, in Hebrews chapter 11, we have what we call the Hall of Fame of Faith, 32 individuals from Abel, from Noah, Abraham, David, Samson, Jephthae, Rahab, a host of men and women who we know that we know that we know they did it to the best of their ability the way God orchestrated it be done. You know what we forget to do? We forget to read the end of chapter 11. I mean, this is the Hall of Fame. When you get to the end, beginning in verse 35, you know what the Bible tells us? They were relegated to a life of wearing sheepskin and goat skins. Now, before you say, "Well, how bad could that be?" You want to do it? It says they were tried without cause, limbs were torn from their body, and they were sawn in two. In other words, the reality check,

the attitude is this, that if I do it quote God's way, if I do it according to what the Bible says, do not expect or accept the fact that the world is going to honor you, prosper you, and make your life any better.

How am I doing for selling this thing today, right? You know what the action is? Notice what it says down to verse 110, "The wicked have laid a snare for me." So not only, now let me go back to the beginning. God's got a lot around us according to his word. He's going to guide us every step, every day. We're resolved to do so. We know that it won't always be plush. We know there could be difficulty. We know there could be opposition. And then the Bible says, whoa, there are going to be people that lay a trap for us? You know, one of the great passages in the Bible is found in Galatians chapter 6. It says that, don't worry, God is not mocked. You will reap what you sow. If you sow spiritual things, you'll reap spiritual things. If you sow carnal things, you're going to reap carnal things. And one of the big struggles is we forget Deuteronomy 32 and Romans 14 tells us, "Revenge is mine, saith the Lord." And so when we talk about a reality check, when we say today, "I understand God desires to guide my future, not necessarily week or month by month, but day by day, that there's going to be some tough times. There's going to be some difficulty. There are going to be those who lay a trap for me and I have got to quote, trust that he's never going to leave me, he's never going to forsake me, and much like coaches and teachers will preach all the day long, it might be the affliction and the difficulties of life that give me the fortitude to get to the next step where his light is guiding me."

It leads to one very powerful conclusion, a response. How do you and I take in all this information and how do we respond to it? Notice what it says in verse 108, "Accept, I beseech thee, the free will offerings of my mouth." Now, that's an interesting word because it doesn't occur much in your Bible where it says a, quote, free will of one's own volition. In other words, there is this response of, "God, I'm not going to do this under coercion. I'm not going to do this under manipulation. I'm going to trust you step by step and day by day simply because I desire and, quote, want to." Now, if you go back in the Bible and say when do we see this word? The book of Ezra chapter 2 and chapter 7, we see this word in regards the Israelites when they came back from the Babylonian captivity when they quote rebuilt the city and the temple, but the first mention, this is critical, the first time you see in your Bible humanity saying, "Okay, God, we're going to willingly, volitionally trust you," is in Exodus chapter 25. Now let me set the stage. The Israelites have come out of Egypt. They've come through the Red Sea. They find themselves in that famous wilderness experience. Moses comes down with the Ten Commandments. They build a tabernacle, the first, quote, worship place this side of Egypt. What's fascinating in Exodus chapter 25 verse 2, here's what it says, "Let them bring a freewill offering as they desire." Oh, great. I'm going to do it God's way. I choose to do it. This is of my own volition. But you've got to read the rest of the chapter. God gives us the blueprint for the tabernacle. You ready for this? He tells us the dimensions, length, height, depth. You know what he told the Israelites? He said, "When you go out there, I need you to get badger's skins. Badger's skins. I need you to make sure that certain panels are blue, others are purple. Once you construct that, I need you to build a box. It needs to be this dimension by that dimension. I need you to overlay it with gold. Oh, by the way priests, I

need you to wear a special..." I mean it just goes on and on and on. So why did God begin those chapters with this idea of a freewill offering? Did you know that badgers were not indigenous to where the wilderness experience was? Now, can I speak Southernees? "You know, you take a good old plump squirrel, it's about the same size as a badger, let's just use one of those. Or, we don't have any plants here with blue dye. Eh, cut Joe, let him bleed on it, red'll be good, no problem." In other words, we're quick to have this attitude of, "Okay God, I'll do what you say," until it becomes an inconvenience in your life, it becomes a difficulty in your life, it becomes a stumbling block in your life because what he's asking you to trust him in may not be easy, may not be smooth, and it may not be indigenous to how you were raised, how you grew up, or what the world is trying to, quote, throw down your throats.

So what's the action? Notice in verse 111, "Thy testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever: they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes, even unto the end." In other words, this grand conclusion of dealing with our future in the word of God is saying, "Okay, God, I may not get it. I may not understand it. It may not be comfortable. There may be affliction. There may be those that put a snare in my way. You may not show me more than I can see just this day but I'm willing to do so. I'm willing to trust, and not only me," but notice verse 111 to 112, "I'm gonna pass this down to future generations."

I want to conclude today with a very powerful thought. We have gathered in this place. We have celebrated the resurrection of Jesus in this place. We have celebrated families that the Lord has blessed with children in this place. You realize you are 2,000 years on this side of the empty tomb. The only way, the only reason you've heard about Jesus and you know who Jesus is is because somebody somewhere in the past didn't quit or give up. Somebody said, "This is so important I'm gonna pass it down to the next generation." There's an old adage about Christianity, we're only one generation from extinction. That's it. All it takes is one generation to say, "You know what? Just go ahead and listen to the world. It doesn't matter. Let them feed you and don't worry about what the Bible says. After all, the Bible only gonna tell you one day ahead, the world's gonna tell you what's happened next month, next year, next decade, whatever it is." All it takes is one generation for extinction.

So the response today is this, will we say, "You know what? It may not look the way I like. It may not sound the way I like. I'm just gonna trust God day by day. I wish I could see the week. I wish I could see the month. I wish I could see the next decade. But if he'd just get me through today, then I'll wake up tomorrow and I'll trust him for Monday, then I'll trust him for Tuesday, etc." You and I have a very important decision to make. Are we going to trust the darkness outside the light to tell us what's coming, or are we gonna trust the lamp of his word just to guide us day by day?

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Today when we talk about God guiding and directing and showing us the future, you know, it's just in our human nature, we cannot help but think beyond this day. We can't help but think to the days forward. Even though God promises just that meager lamp of light around our life, he's told us

over and over and over in his word that there is coming a day, there is coming a day where each and every one of us will go from this life to the next and we will stand before an almighty, holy God. And so I ask you, as we kind of sit here just with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, have you thought about that future? Have you thought about what the word of God says? Because according to Romans chapter 10, it says, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and there's ample passages that show you the contrary to those who do not. Maybe today's the day where the Spirit of God took the word of God, and as we talk about the daily decisions of life and trusting the word of God, maybe today, maybe he did a surgical procedure on your heart and said, "Hey, this is the day. I've shown you the light of my word. I've shown you the truth of Jesus. This is the day for you to believe." The great news is it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord, not who gets religion, not who starts going to church and never misses, not who gets baptized, not who memorizes the Bible, it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord, maybe today's the day where the light of God's word on this day showed you your future and your need to believe, your need to call upon Jesus. If that's you today, let me encourage you to do so. You don't have to read from a script. You don't have to repeat what I or somebody else might say. It's just a heart's cry and maybe your heart's cry today will go a little something like this. "God, today I recognize, I realize your word is true and it's shown me that I have a sin problem. God, I've been places I should have never been. I've participated in activities I should have never been a part of. God, you know I have spoken words and I've had thoughts that are so contrary to your word. And your Bible says in Romans 6:23, the wages, the result of my sin is death. God, you've shown me that today but your word also says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God, today I want you to know I understand I have a sin problem but I believe that according to your word the only solution is Jesus. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to his cross he was bearing the pain, the punishment of my sin. God, today I believe that just as we sang earlier, after three days, he rose and he walked out of that tomb and when he did so, he made it possible, he made it feasible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today, I don't have the answers to all the issues of life, the struggles of life, the what's coming next in life but I know this, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, you might be that person today who cried out for Jesus to save you. In just a moment, I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing together. I just want to invite you wherever you are, just to step out and step forward. I'll be here. We'll have others as well. We want to celebrate with you. We want to pray with you. We want to pray for you. Or maybe today you say, "Pastor, I've already made that decision, but I sure would like to talk to somebody about this baptism thing I see and hear about all the time." Or maybe today you're that person who says, "You know what? This is my church home. What does that look like to make that official?" Or maybe today you say, "You know what? I know it's one week post-resurrection Sunday, and man, it's been great to be here, but I'm just struggling. I'm just going through a hard time. It sure would be nice to have somebody pray with me or pray

for me." Whatever it is the Lord's impressed upon your heart through his word, we just want to be here for you.

Lord Jesus, thank you, thank you that today we celebrate that the tomb is still empty, we celebrate the fact that your mercy and your grace is so far beyond the length and the breadth of our transgression and our sin. Today, O God, may we trust our tomorrow to you, may we trust that your word will never misguide us, never mislead us, but more importantly today may we trust our every tomorrow to you, may we trust our future, our eternity in the hands of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray, amen.