

What We Have Learned

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Psalm 119

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As you're being seated this morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Psalm, chapter 119. Today, we have made our way to the last section. We're going to begin in verse 169. If you're a guest, if you're a visitor with us, I want to welcome you to the last message in a series through Psalm 119, a day that I like to call Caboose Sunday. I mean, this is the end of the train, so to speak. And even though you may not have been with us the last few weeks or months, don't worry. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It has 22 sections of 8 verses each for a total of 176 but there's one overarching primary theme, and that is that the word of God should be the loudest and most primary voice in our lives. We've been walking through Psalm 119 for two simple reasons. Number one, we as a church family, and if you're not a part of it, we would encourage you to do so, we are challenging ourselves as individuals to take an entire chapter of scripture and place it to memory this calendar year, and hopefully as a church body, we will memorize the totality of God's word. But secondly, walking through Psalm 119, where there's this repetitive theme of the primacy of the word of God in our lives, it communicates to us that in every scenario, every situation, every struggle of life, there is not only doctrinal truth, but there's practical application to the word of God.

Today we come to the last section and much like you would expect from a book that you would read normally, whether sacred or secular, today is somewhat of a summary, somewhat of a conclusion; it's kind of looking back on the previous 21 sections that have been building to this quote, grand conclusion. And we're going to ask somewhat of a rhetorical question today and the question is simply this: what have we learned? What have we learned walking through Psalm 119, not only about the word of God, but about our own respective lives? And here's what you're about to discover, what we have learned is that every one of us, whether we realize it or not, we have a foundational belief system and on that belief system, we build convictions that guide our lives and those convictions lead to decisions that ultimately produce behaviors and a future of our lives. And so today, though it is very applicable in a practical sense, it's also very deep theologically as we discover the incredible impact that the word of God can and should have in our life. Beginning in verse 169, the conclusion of the longest chapter in the Bible.

169 Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word. 170 Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word. 171 My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes. 172 My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness. 173 Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. 174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight. 175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me. 176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

As we kind of finish or come to a conclusion of this great chapter in scripture, one of the things we discover is that it is in the book of Psalms and Psalms is just a biblical word for songs and originally these verses were not just meant to be recited and to be meditated upon but they were meant to be sung, they were meant to be declared not only individually but also corporately. And what we discover in this last section of Psalm 119 is almost, if you allow me to say, a four verse song, so to speak, with the respective two verses per respective stanza and/or verse and it begins in verse 169 by saying, "Let my cry come before thee, give me understanding." You know, every one of us, whether you realize it or not, that is the mission that you're on, that is the quest that your life has taken you. Whether consciously or unconsciously, every single human being, from Adam and Eve to you and I, every one of us is on a quest for understanding. How do we understand the world around us? How do we see the world around us? One of the, I guess, academic terms is, what is our world view? How do we see the existence or the experience that we're navigating.

Every single human being has to answer four very basic but important questions. We have to answer, where did we come from? What's the problem? How do we fix it? And where are we headed? You think about that really sums up all of life, right there. When we look at all the great philosophies, all the great thinking of this world, they answer those four questions, our origin, our problems, our solutions, and our destiny. But notice what 169 says, "give me understanding according to thy word." So what have we discovered, what have we learned not just in Psalm 119, but in the totality of scripture? How does the Bible address that? Now, lest you question the validity of the biblical narrative here, in John chapter 17, Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. I mean, we are hours before his crucifixion. Peter, James, and John, they're asleep, you know, on the side, so to speak, of the garden. It's just him alone. In Matthew chapter 26, we hear the story of him going back and forth to the disciples but there in John 17, we call it the high priestly prayer. It's the longest prayer of Jesus we have recorded and in verse 17, I want you to hear what Jesus says. He says, "Father, thy word is truth." And what Jesus basically said was that everything he did and everything that was a part of his ministry was according to what the word of God said.

So when it says here, "give me understanding according to thy word," what does the Bible, what does Psalm 119 say about those four questions? Well, it's very obvious. The very first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." If you want to know where you originated, you originated from God. If you want to get a

little more specific, in chapter 2 of the book of Genesis, it said the Lord reached down into the dirt of the earth and he formed a man by the name of Adam and in doing so, he breathed into him and the Bible says he became a living soul. Later in chapter 3, the woman who was brought to him in chapter 2 is given a name. The Bible says her name is Eve because she will be the mother of all the living.

And so when you begin to go back in the biblical story and discover, where did it all begin, it began with God, his plan and his purpose, but we know it did not take long for things to go sideways. This is where we get to what's the problem. In Genesis chapter 3, the old serpent, the devil, showed up. He began to communicate with us and he asked us a very important question, "Yea, hath God said?" You realize the first temptation that Satan brought to humanity was to question the validity of the word of God for our lives. Here's essentially what he questioned, "Did God really say what he meant and did he really mean what he said?" So what did we do? We began to rationalize. We began to justify. We began to overthink, so to speak. You know what we concluded? We concluded somehow God was cheating us, God was robbing us of all the human experience, so we decided to do the one thing he told us not to do, and we ate of that, quote, forbidden tree. God told us in chapter 2 of Genesis, "In the day that you do thereof, you will surely die." There in Genesis 3, humanity found themselves spiritually dead. Later, the Bible records in Genesis 5, those two individuals would experience their, quote, physical death.

Here's the bigger question: what's the solution? I mean, how do we fix this problem? I mean, after all, we have fallen in sin, we've rebelled against God. How do we get in a right relationship with him because the Bible says in the book of Romans, all have sinned. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages of our sin is death. Chapter 5 verse 8 of the book of Romans it says, but while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us. Earlier in Romans chapter 3, there's this big Bible word that's used in verse 25. It says Jesus Christ was the propitiation for our sin. That's a big word with a really simple definition. It means he paid the price for our sin. He allowed himself to bear the punishment that we rightfully deserve. You may have heard it said this way, Jesus Christ died a death he did not deserve so that we could have life we could never earn. That was the solution to the sin problem.

Now, the fourth question is this: where are we headed? Well, according to the Bible, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." So, in other words, when we understand our sin condition, we believe Jesus Christ is the only solution and we call upon him to save us, we have everlasting life in a place the Bible calls heaven, but those who reject, in a place of torment, the Bible refers to as hell.

Your belief system will be the foundation of everything in your life. Every conviction, every decision, every aspect of your life is built upon this foundation, is built upon, for lack of better terms, this biblical slab, so to speak. So if you call out, "God, I want my understanding according to your scriptures," you cannot vary from what I just shared with you. You came from God, sin's the problem, Jesus is the answer, you're either

headed to heaven or hell. That's the belief system. That's it. That is biblical Christianity in a quote, proverbial nutshell, right there. But as a believer, upon this foundation that is formed in Jesus Christ, there are convictions that are held. Notice what it says in verse 171, "My lips shall utter praise." Verse 172, "My tongue shall speak of thy word." In other words, it's saying that because of our belief in Jesus Christ, because of our claiming to be believers, what we might call according to Acts 11 being Christians, our lives should be an expression of what we believe. And that's exactly what convictions are. Convictions are an outpouring of, they're a natural flow out of what you subscribe to as the foundation of your life. Just like a quote-unquote physical house is only as sturdy as the foundation underneath, one's convictions operate the same way. It says, "My lips will show praise, my life." I've mentioned this several times throughout the series. There's 176 verses in Psalm 119. Of those 176 verses, 172 of them explicitly mention or reference the Bible, scriptures, commandments, precepts. In other words, what it's sharing to us as believers in Jesus Christ is that our lives, our goal, our convictions should be to subscribe and ascribe our life as closely to scripture as we can. In other words, if he said it, he meant it. If he meant it, he said it. And it doesn't matter what the culture advocates. It doesn't matter what we feel. It doesn't matter what our preferences are. We have been called to speak, to address, and to live a life, what you just read, according to his commandments.

Now, when it comes to our convictions, it is purely based on how you view this book, how you view the scriptures, how you view the Bible. I'm about to share with you a story that took place first week my freshman year in college. Just down the street, this is graduation Sunday. This is a day, a weekend where families from literally all over the world will gather in our community and they'll celebrate what for many of them is the conclusion of their academic careers. Four years ago, or some of their cases five or six years ago, it began. Please, parents, find humor in that. I want to take you back to my very first week on a college campus. There I was at the world's largest historic Baptist University. You know, part of being at that university was you didn't have a choice. You had to take two courses back then. They've since changed it. It was New Testament, Old Testament. If you were going to graduate in atheism, you still had to take New and Old. They didn't offer atheism. I'm just telling you, you had to take those two courses. My very first week, I walk into a New Testament course. Professor walks in the room, large lecture hall. It was a mandatory class, no matter what your major was. Large, getting 100 plus students in the room and I want to show or share with you what he did. Now this is my first week in college, first time I've ever been in a course academically that was teaching, quote, the Bible. He takes a Bible in his hand, and obviously he refers to it. He introduces it to it. Almost everybody in the room knew exactly what it was. And here's what he did and for those listening on the radio, you're just going to have to visualize this. He walked over to one side of the lecture hall, and he leaned against the wall. Here's the statement he made, he said for some people this book contains the word of God. It was inspired by God, breathed by God, is preserved by God. He said every single word, you can't dispute it, you can't question it. He said what he meant. He meant what he said. Great, right? Then he walked to the other side of the lecture hall and he leaned against the wall and he said for some people this is just a good book. That's all it is. No different than any other book. It's just a good book. And then he did something that would completely

change the course and the direction of my life, though I never knew it. He took one step away from that wall, and he said, here's where your professor stands. Let's get started. In other words, here was an individual who claimed the name Christianity, he would claim that Jesus Christ was his Savior, but he also claimed that the Bible did not subscribe or ascribe to him the basis for his life, how he should live it, the decisions that he should make, nor that which he should promote or that which he would speak contrary to.

Your convictions matter. what you hold dear, and listen to me, one of the battles that or the battle that we're having in our culture in our country today, one of the biggest problems we have is because we have this clash of cultures, those that subscribe to what the Bible says and those that do not. In fact, we see this all throughout the Bible, it's just a part of it. And so one of the things that we know today is this, that how you see the Bible, how you subscribe to it will dictate your convictions, and listen to me, your convictions, what you hold dear, what you claim to be true, what you celebrate and what you speak contrary to will ultimately produce the decisions for your life.

Now, when it comes to the decisions for our life, we know there's a host of them, but think about this, what you believe leads to heartfelt convictions. Your heartfelt convictions on how you view scripture ultimately will lead to your decisions. I want you to notice what it says in verse 173, "Let thy hand help me," listen to this next statement, "for I have chosen thy precepts." Now I want to show for you today an illustration. This illustration is actually to expose what I consider a fallacy of the faith. I think there are many of us who say, "Well, I believe in Jesus. I believe the Bible. And you know, it just kind of goes the way it goes. It is what it is. There's not a whole lot I can quote unquote do about it." That mentality that is so prevalent, which is so contrary to what we read, what did we just read? It said, "I choose your word." Not, "Eh, whatever happens." You know, when I read that verse, it reminds me, at least how people think, it reminds me of one of the most famous daytime game shows of all time. The Price is Right. Yes, for my generation, we grew up on the Price is Right. Why? Because there was nothing else to watch in the summertime. That being said, it's been through a host of hosts, and it's gone through its decades but it has a series of games that are played by the contestants. I'm sure you know it well. For those of you who have never watched it, just Google it or YouTube it, you'll recognize that it is what it is. But one of the most famous games on the Price is Right, Plinko. See, the reason you laughed is you know what Plinko is. Plinko is a game where a contestant takes an item, it's somewhat disc-shaped, and they go to the top of this board that has a series of pegs on it, and they just drop it and it just bounces around. Now, at the bottom are some pretty important options. You might can win \$10,000. You might win nothing. You might win \$500. There's a host of them, and when you play Plinko, you are just subject to chance and gravity. For those of you, there may be some of you who have not seen it, for those of you who want to reminisce, we have a quick video to show you Plinko. Here we go, here's Plinko. There it is, right there. You drop the disc, it falls. That contestant won a thousand bucks. They could have won a whole lot more. They could have won a whole lot less. But what was it? It's just chance is all it is.

I want you to understand that if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you claim the scriptures to be true and they are the basis for your convictions, your decisions, you don't

have the privilege to leave them up to chance. In fact, what does it say? "I choose your word." It reminds me one of the most famous verses of all the Bible all back in the Old Testament the book of Joshua chapter 24. The Israelites, they find themselves in a really good place. They're in a good position. I mean they've gone across the Red Sea. They've survived the wilderness They've gone across the Jordan River. The walls of Jericho have fallen. The Promised Land is before them. Everything seems great and they get to the end of Joshua 24 and there's this famous verse. Some of you have it framed in your home or embossed on the rocks at the doorstep of your house, "But as for me and my house, we'll serve the Lord." It's a great verse but you notice how it begins, "But." You do realize anytime you have the word "but" in the Bible, there's something before that that's very strategic, very important. You back up that famous passage to verse 13 of Joshua 24. Here's what it says, "You have vineyards you did not plant. You have buildings you did not have to construct. You have farms you did not have to plant. And it is all before you. Choose you this day whom you will serve. Will you serve the gods on the other side of the floods, will you serve the gods of Egypt, or will you serve the one true God? But as for me and my house, we choose the Lord."

Now the reason that verse is so important is that our lives, even as believers, are not happenstance. They're not left up to chance. Every single day you wake up, you have countless decisions to make and let me summarize those decisions: will you render them based on what the word of God says, or simply how you feel? Will you base those decisions on, "Thus saith the Lord," or what the loudest voices are promoting? See, here's the struggle, we have this belief that leads to convictions, decisions, but at the end, verse 175 and 176, there are consequences. There are results. There are, shall we say, there's a future before us. It says, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." Those last two verses of this longest chapter of the Bible are so critical. Notice verse 175. He talks about praising him, being in the right place with him. You know, one of the old adages of Christianity is simply this: the safest place in the world is right in the center of the will of God. That's absolutely true. And in a world today, as you read through Psalm 119 and the host of other passages, that's increasingly more hostile to Christianity. In fact, you get into 2 Timothy chapter 3 and 4, the end of the Apostle Paul's life, you know what he says is going to happen in the last days? He says in the last days, men will be lovers of themselves. They will reject authority. They will have a religion with no power. Then in chapter 4 he says, and they're going to seek out teachers who will itch their ears so that they continue to promote this. You know what the problem in those two chapters of 2 Timothy is? He's not speaking to the lost pagans, he's speaking to those who, quote, claim the name of Jesus. There will be a day, in fact, 2 Thessalonians 2 says, there's coming a time, there will be a, quote, unquote, great falling away. What are they falling away from? They're falling away from scriptural conviction and belief.

And so what it's saying, verse 175, "I will praise thee according to thy judgments." I've said it before, I'm going to say it again. It doesn't matter what the issue, the subject, the scenario, the struggle is, if it is only you and God, that's a majority. That's a majority. So if the Bible advocates it, the Bible promotes it, feel free to celebrate it. If the Bible speaks against it, you better be on the Bible side because the world may champion you, but

according to this, "I can praise thee, O God." So in other words, we believe in Jesus, convicted the Bible is true, we render a purposeful decision, I'm going to affirm what God says, the world may not like it, may not celebrate it, but you're right in the center of God's will and you can smile before God.

But look at that last verse, "I am like a sheep that has gone astray." How many times in our own respective lives, how many times in our corporate lives do we advocate, promote, justify, or rationalize something contrary to the word of God? You know, in John chapter 10, Jesus said he was the good shepherd but there was a hireling, there was a false shepherd that would come with fancy words and expectations, tell you what you want to hear and what you desire to hear. You know, we speak about the future, I'm gonna go back to those four questions, where did you come from, what's the problem, how do you fix it, where are you headed? Can I tell you where every one of us is headed? Every single one of us, one day, according to Hebrews 9:27, we're gonna stand before God. We're going to stand before God and when you stand before God, it's like verses 175 and 176. There's only two options. There's only two choices. You are either in Revelation chapter 20, you're either in front of him, being judged to a lake of fire, or you're behind him, awaiting the eternal blessing that he promised you in John 3:16.

I want to conclude Psalm 119 with one of the great dialogues in all of your Bible. It's in John chapter 14. It's the night before Jesus' crucifixion. He's washed their feet. They're eating what we know as the Last Supper and in John 14, Jesus makes this really grand, great statement. He says, "If you believe in God, believe in me also for I go to prepare a place for you, for in my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would tell you, don't worry, I will come again and I will take you with me." It's a great statement. Do you know which one of the apostles, which one of the disciples spoke up? Thomas. The one who we typically refer to as doubting Thomas because a week later he was struggling with the whole resurrection thing but there in John chapter 14, you remember what Thomas said? He said, "Jesus, how do we know? How can we know that we know that we know?" And you know what he said in verse 6? He said, "I am the way, I'm the truth, and I'm the life. There is nobody who comes to the Father but by me." And at the end of our lives, and at the end of this study, there's an important decision to render. Do we, as verse 175 says, do we ascribe to what God said so that one day we're on the right side praising him or do we reject it, end up on the wrong side and be the sheep that are condemned by him? See, what you believe matters. Your conviction of God's word matters. The decisions you render matter because I want to leave you with this last thought, eternity is awfully long to be wrong.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. As we come to this time in our service, you might be with us physically in person, you might be online, TV, radio, wherever you are today might be that day where the word of God was taken by the Spirit of God and it just convicted you of your relationship with God. And maybe today's the day where you discover that you've never answered the problem of sin. Maybe today you would be willing to admit you've tried to clean up your life. You've tried to get better here. You've tried to get better there. You've tried to get religious. You've done this. You've done that. The Bible says in Romans 10:13, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It

doesn't say whoever joins a church, whoever gets baptized. It doesn't even say whoever goes on the mission field. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. And maybe today is that day where you realize your sin condition, you realize your need for Jesus, and it's time for you to call out to him. It's not about reading a script. It's not about taking what I might say or somebody else might say and just repeating it. You don't even have to do it out loud. It's just about a heart's cry of admitting your sin condition and believing and asking Jesus to save you. If you're that person today, it doesn't matter where you are, let me encourage you just to cry out. Maybe your heart's cry would go with something like this. "God, today I believe and understand what you already know about me. I have a sin problem. God, I have been places I should have never been. I have participated in things I should have never been a part of. God, you know I have spoken words and I have had thoughts that are so contrary to your word. And your Bible makes it clear that the result, the wages of my sin is death. And God, I'm willing to admit I deserve it and I own it. But the rest of that verse says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God, today I believe the only answer to my sin problem is Jesus. He's the only one and so God today I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf. He lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, today I believe he died a sacrificial death on his cross as the payment and the punishment for my sin. And God today, I believe that three days later, when he rose from the grave, he made it feasible, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven, my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the conflicts and the struggles of this old world, but there's one thing I know, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. 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, in a moment I'm going to pray for us and after I pray, we're going to stand and sing, and maybe today's the day you cried out for Jesus to save you. I want to invite you, just wherever you are, 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. Maybe today you say, "Well, pastor, I've already rendered that decision. I've been a believer for years, maybe even decades." Maybe today, though, you say, "You know what? I'd like to have a conversation about that whole baptism thing." Or maybe today you say, "I'd like to talk to somebody. What does it mean to be a part of this incredible family of faith, this church?" Or maybe today you say, "You know what, I'm just walking through a really tough season. I'm at my wit's end. I'm at the end of my rope. It'd be really nice if I had somebody just come alongside and pray with me or pray over me." Whatever the decision is, we just, we want to be a part of whatever God's doing in your life.

Lord Jesus, as we come to the conclusion of this service, Lord, as we come to the conclusion of Psalm 119, thank you, O God, that you made it so abundantly clear there's only two paths to life and that which makes all the difference is Jesus Christ. God, I pray for those who have yet to believe that today would be the day of salvation. Convict them of their need for Jesus. God, I pray today that we wouldn't listen to the rhetoric of this old world, but we would simply listen to your word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.