

The Word of God

Psalm 119:89-96

When the calendar changes over from one year to another many of us find ourselves going back and forth between looking back and looking ahead.

Some of us find ourselves wondering where the time went.

Anybody like that? I know time is a fixed constant but it seems to me that the more time that we have in the rear view mirror of life that faster time seems to go.

Some of us find ourselves looking back with a number of happy memories and a heart full of thankfulness.

There are those who can celebrate the birth of children and grandchildren.

Some graduated from school, started a new career, or moved into a new home.

Some of us find ourselves looking back on the year with some regret and sadness.

We can look back on some things that we wanted to do, but never got around to doing.

We can look back on some things that we said and did wishing they had not happened.

Many can look back on a year of heartbreak and loss.

Several people have faced injury and sickness.

Others have lost loved ones and have had to go through a number of first anniversaries, birthdays, and Christmases with the shadow of death hanging over them.

It is a mixed bag as we look back.

Along with looking back we also look forward.

Because the future has not happened yet, a person's outlook depends substantially on their attitude.

Those who find themselves more on the pessimistic side of things tend to be a bit less excited about the year ahead.

On the other hand those who are a little less pessimistic or even find themselves on the optimistic side of things tend to think of the New Year as a fresh start.

This will be the year that I start to exercise and eat right.

This will be the year I get a promotion.

This will be the year the Leafs win the Stanley Cup.

With all of this looking back and looking forward, hopefully one of the things we are doing is evaluating.

Hopefully, all of us take some time and consider the things that we value, the things that take our attention, and take our time.

As we consider those things we should ask ourselves, “Do we have the right priorities in life?”

As believers, one of the things we should ask ourselves is, “What place does the word of God have in our lives?”

Every New Year I always encourage everyone in our congregation to take up daily bible reading with a plan that takes you through the whole Bible over the course of the year.

We’ve made the ‘Five Day Reading Plan’ available at the back of the church.

If you don’t have a bible reading plan that takes you through the whole bible I would strongly encourage you to take a copy with you and resolve to read God’s Word regularly.

[Towards that end I want to turn our attention this morning towards Psalm 119. This is the longest chapter in the bible with 176 verses. It is divided into 22 sections one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For each letter there are eight verses and in the Hebrew the first word of each sentence begins with the corresponding Hebrew letter for those eight verses. It is an amazing literary work and it is all about the Word of God. This morning I would like to draw your attention to **verses 89-96** and three important lessons we find there concerning God’s word. Number one is this...]

Point #1 – God’s Word lasts. (Verses 89-91)

No matter how much things may come and go in this world, whatever new trend may be on the horizon, no matter how godless humanity becomes, what God has said will stand.

Verse 89 begins with a statement, an amazing statement, about the Bible.

The writer is intentionally specific here. If you look in your bible you will likely see the word LORD all in capital letters.

Most translations do that to indicate that God’s proper name Yahweh is present in the original language.

The words of Allah, Joseph Smith, the Watchtower, Greco-Roman mythology, Hinduism, Secularism, or all other religion are all time limited, but the Word of the one true God, Yahweh, that is eternal.

That is true whether we are looking forward in time or backwards.

God’s word will stand forever into the future, but it has also stood for all eternity past as it has always been in the mind of God.

God’s word does not change, nor does it bend or retreat before the will of mankind.

Instead it ‘stands firm in the heavens’. That means its truth and certainty are held secure outside of this creation by the power of the LORD.

The writer gives us some reasons for his claim in verses 90-91.

God's Word is eternal because it reflects the nature of its author.

The word 'faithfulness' here has the sense of being firm or steadfast.

The LORD does not move from generation to generation.

He does not give up, He does not through up His hands and walk away.

For as long as creation endures, He does what He says.

That is why the creation itself is still here.

The calendar has turned on another year, the sun has risen on another day because the LORD gives the command and another day is given.

How can that be? How can we trust the word of God no matter how many generations pass no matter what things may look like in the world?

Look again at **verse 91**.

It is because of God's sovereignty (His ability to rule/govern/control) absolutely everything known and unknown, seen and unseen, down to the smallest atom that His word endures.

What God promises in His Word is not left to chance, it is not a 50/50 proposition, it is going to happen because He has the power and the unwavering resolve to bring everything that He has purposed from all eternity past into being.

[I don't know about you, but I appreciate things that last a long time. I think of things that the Romans built that are still around today. Those guys knew how to build roads and buildings. Some of their roads are still in use today and the Colosseum is almost 2000 years old. Or think of the pyramids in Egypt. They are about 4500 years old and still standing. That is incredible but one day they will all turn to dust.]

People, civilizations, and all the things of this current creation are temporary.

The New Year is a reminder of that.

That is precisely why there is nothing in the whole of this creation that can satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.

The Bible says God has "set eternity in the hearts" of human beings.

We all have a longing for forever and we cannot satisfy that longing with things that come and go, we need something more.

[God, in His grace, offers us that in His word. When you and I hold a Bible in our hands we are literally holding on to something eternal. Not the ink and paper, but what is revealed to us by means of ink and paper. As the prophet Isaiah says, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." The Word of God lasts! That truth should do something for us if we believe it and it is impossible to belong to Christ apart from believing His word. That is what the psalmist teaches us in verses 92-93, he shows us that...]

Point #2 – God’s people must be committed to God’s Word. (Verses 92-93)

There is an abundance of distraction in this life that can easily take us away from time in the Bible and we must fight against those things to keep the scriptures as a high priority in our hearts and minds.

When the writer speaks of God’s word in verse 89 he likely has in mind the whole word (דְבַר) of God and then through the psalm he reflects on different portions of God’s Word.

In verse 92 here he speaks of God’s “law” (תּוֹרָה) likely referring to the first five books of the Bible revealed to and written down by Moses.

In those books we find God’s regulations for the people of Israel that govern their morality, their civil government, and their worship/ceremony.

We find the summary of the law in what we usually call the Ten Commandments.

Look with me at what is said here about God’s law (**Verse 92**).

It is possible to obey a law without liking it.

It is possible to be completely ok with breaking a law but refrain from doing so for fear of the consequence should you be caught breaking the law.

That is the way societies throughout history have kept order.

The problem with that is it does nothing to address the default condition of the human heart.

People, including you and me, are evil by nature and so if you remove the consequence for breaking the law what will people do? They will break the law.

That is exactly what we see in the world as it relates to the law of God.

As our world becomes increasingly godless having no fear of His judgment we see an increase of disregarding His word.

God, according to His common grace, does restrict human evil and that is good, but that is not enough to belong to Him as His people, and that is not enough to help us in any lasting sense.

What does he say here? He says that God’s law was/is his ‘delight’.

He does not follow God’s law simply out of fear, although it is right to fear God.

He follows God’s law because he sees the goodness of it in and of itself.

He sees that God’s laws are more than arbitrary instructions, he sees that they flow out of the goodness of who the LORD is.

Apart from that delight there is only destruction.

To that he adds this in **Verse 93**.

A precept is a general rule that governs behaviour and thought.

He is likely thinking here about how God’s laws are actually applied and lived out in life.

That is, I believe, the biblical definition of wisdom, to rightly apply God's word to our lives.

He has committed his life to that, to filling his mind with the word of the LORD and living his life accordingly.

On account of that he says, the LORD has 'preserved *his* life.'

Simply put, the Bible works brothers and sisters.

Does that mean life is free from trials? No! He just told us about perishing and affliction.

What it means is that in the end God's way always proves itself to be true and knowing that His people remain committed to His word.

[Think of it like being a doctor. Would you want to go to a doctor who had no real interest in remembering what he/she had been taught in medical school? Would you want to go to a doctor who had no interest in learning more about medicine? Wouldn't you want to go to a doctor who delighted in remembering what he/she had learned and was always interested in knowing more?]

Just like you can't be a good doctor without knowing what you learned in medical school and continuing to learn as you practice medicine, so too it is impossible to be a Christian without an ongoing affection for the Bible.

Far too many people who claim the name Christian are content to live their life and form their beliefs according to their own thinking.

The genuine Christian life is far different from that.

The Christian life is realizing that our own thinking is foolish and wicked and that it needs to be changed by the living Word of God.

[Can you say this morning that you delight in the Bible? Can you say this morning that you want to know more? Listen, God's word does more than simply tell us rules for life, it tells us about the Author of life. It is impossible to love the LORD and let your bible collect dust on the shelf. That brings us to one more lesson from this text. Here is the lesson...]

Point #3 – God's people find hope in God's Word. (Verses 94-96)

If we want something more substantial in our lives than wishful thinking and weak deceptive theology, then we need to take the task of knowing the bible seriously.

After hearing about the psalmist's commitment to the word of God we might get the impression that he has it in his mind that he can save himself if he just follows God's laws close enough.

That obedience and being rescued is similar to a worker earning his wages for doing a job.

That impression vanishes with **verse 94**.

Whatever trouble he has already faced in his life it is clear that they are not over.

He has no confidence that he is going to rescue himself, rather he cries out to the LORD for salvation.

Notice the basis of his plea.

He does not appeal to his own merit, but instead he appeals to his relationship with God.

It is only after speaking of belonging to the LORD that he adds the seeking out of God's precepts.

That is critical. It is our belonging to God that produces the seeking and delighting in His Word.

The two are inseparable. It is a great error to think that keeping God's law makes us right with Him for we are all law breakers.

That's why Jesus died for us, to pay our debt, to satisfy every requirement of the law on our behalf.

We gain access to that payment by faith in Christ alone.

It is an equally great error to think that receiving the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ by faith accomplishes nothing in our lives.

One of the basic things that belonging to God in Christ does for us is it gives us a delight and desire to "seek out" God's word.

If you have no such desire, you should have great concern for the condition of your soul.

If you do have such a desire, then you have an incredible gift (**Verse 95**).

Every Christian can say the same thing.

"The wicked are waiting to destroy" us.

Sometimes we can see it. Institutions, governments, and people who hate God also hate His people and would like nothing better than to see an end to the Church.

That is happening every day in many parts of the world.

There is also enemies of God's people that go unseen for the most part.

Paul says in Ephesians that we are waging a war against "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms".

Peter says that our "enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

On top of that we have the enemy of death casting a shadow over our lives.

With these great enemies waiting to destroy us, what do we do?

The psalmist says, "I will ponder your statutes." The NAS and NKJ translates "statutes" as "testimonies."

In other words in the face of great forces seeking his destruction, the psalmist turns his attention to the promises of the LORD.

As believers we don't just say things like, "It will all work out in the end" or "follow your heart" or "you'll end up in a better place because you are a good person".

We don't base our hope on wishful thinking or the power of being positive.

Our hope is firmly planted on the rock of God's unchangeable and enduring word which He confirms by His immeasurable power, the power by which He raised Jesus from the dead.

And listen, our hope only increases as we go deeper into the Word of God. (**Verse 96**)

[Imagine a gold mine that never ran out of gold. What would people do if such a mine was discovered? I think it is safe to say they would keep digging.]

If you are holding a bible in your hands this morning, and you should be, you are holding something that is worth far more than gold.

We are holding something of eternal worth that shows us the glories of an infinite God.

The more we know of God the more sure our hope will be.

So this is my plea as we stand at the beginning of a New Year.

Let us resolve to turn our attention to the word of God.

If you have been doing that this past year, or even for many years before, good!

You already see the truth of what these verses have told us.

You will continue to benefit from the Word of God.

If you haven't been doing that, start today.

The Bible is an incredible gift of God's grace to us.

Where everything else in creation is fleeting, the word of God lasts.

Because it's God's word, if we are His people we need to be committed to it.

In our commitment to the Word of God we will find certain and glorious hope.