

August 25, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 15 | Psalm 119:105-112 | Nun

Today, we move on to the fourteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Nun. <Insert Picture>

While we do not get to the same intensity of previous stanzas, we will nevertheless dive into the tragic world of the Psalmist. He is hedged about by his enemies who seek to destroy his life. But does this discourage him from following the righteous path? No. If anything, the opposition makes him dig in his heels even deeper in outright defiance of those who would go against God's word. He has seen the light, and he will not return to the darkness once more.

READ: Psalm 119:105-112 (ESV)

Nun

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules.

¹⁰⁷ I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word!

¹⁰⁸ Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your rules.

¹⁰⁹ I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.

¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.

¹¹¹ Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹² I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

What are the principles the Psalmist is trying to instill in this fourteenth stanza?

Vs. 105 Probably no other verse in Psalm 119 is better known than this one. And, in a way, the Psalmist has been building up to this a straightforward expression of what the word of the Lord truly means to him. For our sojourner, the Scriptures are not *many* lamps blanketing the path before him in a great swath of light, but “*a* lamp” illuminating only a few small steps in front of him (cf. Pro. 6:23). His “path” is not bathed in a *mass* of lights so that he may see the subtle intricacies of the route before him; instead, it is lit up by a *singular* “light” sufficient only to keep him from stumbling in the dark. While the Bible gives us glimmers on the horizon of great cities situated on hills shining brightly, God's Word is meant to help us see our here and now.

We must look to God's promises every day, moment to moment, if we wish to avoid grouping aimlessly in the dark looking for direction.

Vs. 106 Little sense is found in the one who has a flashlight but refuses to use it in the dark. Thus, here, our Psalmist has not only made a commitment with his heart to keep God's "righteous rules," but he has also "sworn an oath and confirmed it" with his lips. We live in a world where oath-taking is not as prevalent as it once was. Today, we've traded promises that would've been ratified with a simple handshake for contracts upheld by seemingly endless paragraphs composed in dense legal jargon. Now, this is not to say contractual agreements do not have their place. They most certainly do. However, when we emphasize commitments that have been guaranteed through the rule of law, we tend to devalue promises made verbally. Ideally, a pact made using the spoken word ought to be as binding as a vow made using the written word. After all, God will not only judge the contracts we make, but He will also weigh even the idle conversations we have with one another (cf. Mat. 5:33-37; 12:36-37; Ja. 4:13-15). Yet, despite this strong warning, how easy is it for us to break some oath compared to some contract? In our minds, failure to uphold an agreement is more egregious than breaking a promise. This could not be further from the truth. The follower of God understands that a pledge obligates them to see it through, regardless of the form it takes.

Vs. 107 We return, once again, to the plight of the Psalmist as he says that he's been "severely afflicted." In the last few stanzas, there's been little mention of our sojourner's unenviable state. This does not mean it has gone away. Before, it was a raging torrent; now, it has dwindled to a slow trickle. Not entirely gone, but not as severe as it once was. Thus, he pleads with the Lord, as he has done in the past, to give him "life." The implication being that whatever hardships he was facing is still threatening his every existence. And he bases his petition not on his own merits but on the merits of God's word. He says, "according to your word," bring me life. Effectively, the sojourner is saying, "God, you have told me that you would give me life. So, please, give me that life!" It is quite remarkable how often the Psalmist makes his requests using God's own promises. We who are prone to forget what we've said might be put off when our own words get thrown back at us. However, God knows His words better than any. So, for our sojourner to

repeat them back to Him is not offensive but confirmation that the Psalmist has remembered what God has said.

Vs. 108 The term *ne-da-vaw'*, here translated as “freewill offering,” was a donation given to God that was not regularly prescribed or donated in response to some answered prayer.¹ It was not only a gift given above and beyond what was commanded, but it was a gift given in such a way that indicated there were no strings attached (cf. Ex. 35:29; Deut. 16:10; 23:23; Ezr. 1:4; Ezek. 46:12). For instance, in 2 Chronicles 35, we’re told that the Torah had all but been forgotten by the Jews until it was found again by good king Josiah. He, along with Israel, repented, and they reestablished the Law along and the festivals, namely, the Passover. Interestingly, once Passover was reinstated, Josiah and his officials sent contributions to the people of Israel in the form of lambs, goats, and bulls to the tune of sum 5,800 animals. This extreme example highlights the spontaneity inherent in a freewill offering. However, what’s curious about the use of this word here in our passage is that the Psalmist is not offering something that has any real monetary value. Instead, his freewill offering is that of “praise” (cf. Ps. 19:15).² This might imply our wanderer has little to offer God in the way of coin or sheep. So, he gives to God the only thing he has: worship. Had he been wealthy enough, he would've given the customary offerings. But, as it was, all he owned was the clothes he wore and the words he spoke. Propriety would prohibit him from offering the former, but he held the latter in ample supply. And so, he uses his lips to worship. The writer of Hebrews must’ve been echoing these words when he admonished believers to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” (Heb. 13:15) We might not have a penny to our name, but that ought not to inhibit us from praising His good name. After all, even if we are poor in this life, we are rich in the next because the Lord has taught us His “rules.” Understanding God's word leads to praise, and praising God leads to even more understanding of God’s word. And any who know the words of

¹ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:421.

² Allen, Leslie C., *Psalms 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 190.

Scripture are far more prosperous than the wealthiest man who doesn't (cf. vs. 14, 72; Lu. 16:19-31).

- Vs. 109 How many have heard it said that someone is putting their life in the palm of their hands if they are about to do something dangerous? For instance, someone might take their life in their hands when they're skydiving or bungee jumping. These extreme sports appear to others as needlessly irresponsible. Should the bungee cord break or the parachute fail to open, someone would likely lose their life chasing after some cheap thrill. Here, the Psalmist says, "my life" is in "my hand." At once, we realize that a common idiom in the English language has its root in the Scriptures (cf. Judg. 12:3; 1 Sam. 19:5; 28:21; Job 13:14).³ For, like the skydiver or the bungee jumper, our sojourner feels like his life is in his hand. And not a day has gone by where his life wasn't in jeopardy ("continually").⁴ Why? Is he doing something reckless? No. Is he on the frontlines of some war? No. His life is in peril because he does not "forget" God's "law." In remembering to observe all that God's word commands, he has effectively put a target on his back. Following God is such a risky venture that it will satisfy even the most enthusiastic adrenaline junky. Followers of God have gone through plagues unscathed, survived fiery furnaces, spent nights with ravenous lions, walked on water, healed the sick, and witnessed the dead come alive once more. The grandest adventure is not in risking your life for a momentary high but in sacrificing your life for God (cf. Judg. 12:3). He leads to places unknown that are beyond imagining.
- Vs. 110 The Psalmist explains why his life is constantly in jeopardy when he says "the wicked" arranged a trap for him. Unlike the "cords" of vs. 61 and the "pitfalls" of vs. 85, which were customarily used to subdue larger prey, the *pach*, here translated as "snare," was a net designed to catch small birds.⁵ What's remarkable about the phrasing here is that this ambush seems to be known to our wanderer as he says that he "does not stray from [God's] precepts." Meaning, hypothetically, had our singer/songwriter decided to

³ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 209.

⁴ VanGemenen, William A., *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, Editors, Tremper Longman, III & David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 879.

⁵ Goldingay (2008), 3:422.

disobey Scripture, he would've strayed from the righteous path and may have avoided the snare altogether.⁶ However, this would garner God's displeasure resulting in a loving but firm chastisement (cf. vs. 75). Thus, the Psalmist would rather be obedient (i.e., "not stray") and risk being captured by his enemies than being disobedient and earning disciplinary action from God. Good behavior may put us at odds with our fellow man, but at least it doesn't make us enemies of God.

Vs. 111 The idea of God's "testimonies" as a "heritage" is not new for the Psalmist. He mentioned that God's word was his "allotment" as far back as verse 52. There, we learned that it was likely our sojourner had no actual possessions to speak of. Thus, the only belongings he had of value were the Scriptures. And, even if he did have land, the Lord's precepts would still be of more value (cf. Josh. 11:23; 14:3).⁷ Hence, our singer/songwriter reiterates that point once more when he says that God's word is his true inheritance. He views the principles contained in the Scripture as having far more value than some plot of land or sum of money. He explains why this is by telling us that God's word is the very "joy" of his "heart." Those words are what makes him tick. They give rhyme and reason to his purpose. They are the melody line that brings the other notes of his life in harmony. "The Torah," for the Psalmist, "is a whole promised land of joy, and obedience to it brings its own reward."⁸

Vs. 112 Say what you will about the Psalmist, but he is a doer. Whatever he has said has been backed up with actions. And he has not only committed himself to "preform" the "statues" of God for all eternity ("forever"), but he has pleaded that he'll be obedient to the very "end." The implication being that should he live for all time, he would not bend or break. But should his obedience mean his own demise, his resolve is absolute. Whether over many eons or a few short years, the Psalmist will "incline" his "heart" to God (cf. vs. 36).

"What's your takeaway?"

⁶ Wilcock (2001), p. 209.

⁷ DeClaissé-Walford, Nancy, Rolf A. Jacobson, Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2014), p. 883-884.

⁸ Allen (2002), p. 190.

My takeaway this evening is this: any time I give God something, I must do so with a “freewill offering” mindset. No one gives to God anything that isn’t already His. This is not to say our sacrifice means very little or is merely repayment. Instead, it is giving without thought of return simply because God has been far more generous toward us than we have been or will ever be towards Him.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TEXT: Psalm 119:105-112

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: