

# Truth Talk Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

## *Looking Back at the Path*

For several editions now we have been examining Psalm 119. We have discovered that whoever wrote this psalm had a deep desire to live a life pleasing to God. And, this was no mere whim or fleeting thought banished by the first obstacle or trial encountered on the path. His desire, as well as the path by which such a life could be lived, is meticulously detailed in the twenty-two stanzas which compose the psalm. Since our study has stretched out over a number of editions of “Truth Talk,” I thought it would be helpful to step back and review the path we have been walking with the Psalmist before moving ahead to the next segment of the psalm.

We began by observing that although the authorship of the psalm is unknown, of the probable candidates, perhaps the most likely is the prophet Daniel. As you may recall, I mentioned George Zemek made a convincing case for this position in his helpful commentary, *The Word of God in the Child of God*. By the way, his commentary has also helped shape the structure of the outlines in this series.

Daniel, or whoever the author was, set out what in essence is an extended answer to Psalm One. The Psalter opens with a psalm depicting two ways traveled by two kinds of men who will arrive at two distinct and different ends. One path, the path of blessing, is traveled by the righteous man, who, for his obedience, will prosper and be blessed. The other path, the cursed way, is traveled by the wicked, who, for his disobedience, will perish. Psalm One describes the righteous man as “fortunate” or blessed. And, the secret to becoming such a person is one’s approach to the Law of the Lord, the Bible. Those who delight in this Law and make it their constant meditation will prosper. Those who don’t will perish.

The writer of Psalm 119 alludes to the truth of Psalm One by pointing out the reality of what it stated about people who choose the path of righteousness. They truly are fortunate. The path of righteousness is here presented positively in terms of what these people are consistently like. They constantly maintain a blameless life by walking in the Law of God (119:1). They always seek after God with a whole heart and are committed to obeying His testimonies (119:2). In short, they do not live like the wicked – they don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). Instead, they diligently and persistently walk in God’s designed ways (119:3-4). And, as a result, they are blessed by God (119:1, 2).

Not only does the Psalmist point to such models, he is himself determined to live this way (119:5-8). The rest of this psalm is the record of his attempt to live out his commitment to be a blessed man—the godly man of Psalm 1:1-3. He ends the first stanza by recognizing that such a life is impossible apart from Divine assistance (119:8).

The first thing required if he is to truly live as the individuals mentioned in 119:1-4 is a radical, life-long, internal delight in God's law (Psalm 1:2; 119:9-16). God's law must be his meditation (119:15) and his delight (119:16). Consequently, he will not be ignorant of, or depart from, the way of life that pleases God. God's Word will keep his life pure (119:9) and prevent him from going astray (119:10-11). But, mere possession of God's Word is insufficient for such living. For this Divine instruction is needed (119:12). Only when God does an internal work in his heart will the Psalmist truly rejoice and delight in the Word that he possesses.

So, the first stanza (vv. 1-8) stresses the priority of personal obedience to God's Word as the foundation for living a life that pleases God. The second stanza (vv. 9-16) reveals such obedience requires an attitude that desires to know God's Word as well as an aptitude to diligently retain and obey the instruction contained therein. In other words, the first stanza speaks of the blessing that comes to a person who is determined to live in wholehearted obedience to God's Word, and the second stanza reveals that inner delight and commitment required for such blessing.

In the third stanza (vv 17-24) we are, for the first time in this psalm, introduced to the reality that trials and afflictions will be the expected lot of one who chooses the path introduced in the first two stanzas. And, these trials and affliction will come specifically from those who are not on the righteous path (vv 21-23). We have been so accustomed to thinking that the blessing promised to those who live in accordance with God's Word necessarily involves ease, comfort, and prosperity when in fact the opposite is true. While it is an assured promise from God's Word that the man who seeks God and commits to His Word will be blessed, that blessing does not at all preclude trial and affliction. This stanza demonstrates that the psalmist who so passionately exhorts his readers to pursue God through His Word is not exception. Yet, even in the midst of the affliction and trial, the psalmist reveals that the path to blessing and bountiful life is found in a continued obedience and dedication to God's Word rather than to the natural responses arising in one's heart at such times and under such circumstances. And, in the midst of his deep affliction, the psalmist lifts his voice to God and prays.

If our contention regarding Daniel's authorship is correct than it is not hard to imagine Daniel, knowing that the Chaldean counselors were plotting his demise and speaking to Nebuchadnezzar, committing himself afresh to his continual practice of seeking out God's Words and making them his own counselors! And if we are at all correct in this surmising, Daniel's triumph over the lions (those in the den as well as those in the court) is a comforting reminder that there is indeed bountiful life for those who choose to follow the path established by God's Word rather than leaning to their own understandings when confronted with fierce opposition and strong affliction.

In a powerful statement, the Psalmist reveals his response to affliction and persecution is governed by a deliberate and careful study of God's ordinances, particularly those associated with what God required for worship and access (statutes in v. 23). No personal vendetta or revenge wrongfully taken was worth losing this access to God in worship.

Finally, the psalmist contrasts the wicked counselors who everywhere attacked him with the counselors who were always with him and who were for him not against him. These counselors were God's testimonies or His works and words. These counselors are always available and their counsel is unerringly accurate and faithful. And in following them, Daniel

found life and favor before both the King of Heaven and the earthly monarch he served and at times suffered under.

So it will always be for God's faithful servants. If we are truly living in the way of Heaven we are going to be necessarily strangers and aliens on earth and we can expect to be treated correspondingly. When we suffer unfairly and we need relief from the pressures that come because we are aliens, we must turn to God and continue to lay hold on His Word. When we desperately desire respect we must seek it first from God and only then will we be in a place to receive it from men in due time. In either case, believers must commit themselves afresh to keeping the Word of God as the reason for wanting more life and this will only happen when God opens our eyes and causes us to see that the wonders in His Word far surpass any earthly delight. Then, and only then, will we desire to live for the right reason.

These opening stanzas reveal one man's decision to model his life after the testimony of righteous men who preceded him. They also reveal that such living will require divine assistance to understand and delight in God's Word as the guidebook for the journey. Nor will the journey be easy. Those on this path will encounter strong opposition from those on the other path. But, with God's testimonies as his counselors, the pilgrim will not walk the journey alone or unaided. May this be our experience in the journey ahead.