

“Blessed Are They Who Keep His Statutes”  
Psalm 119.1–8

- <sup>1</sup> Blessed are they whose ways are blameless,  
    who walk according to the law of the LORD.
- <sup>2</sup> Blessed are they who keep his statutes  
    and seek him with all their heart.
- <sup>3</sup> They do nothing wrong;  
    they walk in his ways.
- <sup>4</sup> You have laid down precepts  
    that are to be fully obeyed.
- <sup>5</sup> Oh, that my ways were steadfast  
    in obeying your decrees!
- <sup>6</sup> Then I would not be put to shame  
    when I consider all your commands.
- <sup>7</sup> I will praise you with an upright heart  
    as I learn your righteous laws.
- <sup>8</sup> I will obey your decrees;  
    do not utterly forsake me.

HOPE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Mr. Marshall Malone

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A friend recently told me she would not marry a man until she lived with him first. It was a good opportunity; we talked about the difference between a *covenantal model* of marriage and a *compatibility model* – both are mindsets or worldviews.

The compatibility model is when both parties marry based on mutual compatibility and that compatibility is the foundation of the entire marriage. The problem is – there is little glue to hold them together when they discover that they really aren't all that compatible.

A covenantal marriage is when the parties getting married understand that their union is based on a contract - and it states that each party will – in a sense – lose themselves to someone else; staying married even when compatibility has flown out the window – as it often does.

But it's easy to marry with a mindset of a covenantal marriage, but to bear its fruit is a different matter. (Example: I will not be completely vulnerable until my spouse proves that I am doing it in a safe place) - As if we were depending on our mutual compatibility first, when in fact – the covenant itself is the basis for life together. The covenant is the basis for vulnerability.

So in a sense, we own joy, but we place conditions upon ourselves and others that try to steal it away. It often takes much reminding that the marriage *worked* when they said, "I do."

But what does marriage have to do with Psalm 119.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."<sup>1</sup> AND THEN <sup>32</sup> "This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church."<sup>2</sup>

In Ephesians 5, Paul alludes to a mystery. He draws unique parallels between our relationship to Christ and our relationship to a spouse. The more you ponder it, the more intimate it becomes. And yet it is a mystery.

These mysteries are both inductive, deductive and learned by feel. It takes all of the brain and a whole sum of experiences to glimpse into them. And just as a wife is full of mystery to a husband, so is a Psalm. And there is enough to cause our rejoicing till the end of our days.

The psalm is written with treasures that require digging and meditation. This first stanza gives us an ascension that does not appear much at a glance. It looks like David keeps repeating himself..." But on further reflection, you see admiration, escalating to action, fear, prayer, lament, resolve, awe and peace.

Putting the word in context of marriage emphasizes the personal connection that David was having with this Psalm. Or might I rather say, he was having an intimate experience with God and we are witnessing his expression of that love.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 19:5

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:32

The covenant was the basis for David's joy, as it was his vulnerability, humility, and anything else that gives life in humanity. The union between David and God was fully functioning the moment God said "I do." Yet we don't always see in David's life that he was willing to enjoy the fullness of God's love for David. Yet in this moment, we see evidence of a very deliberate expression of joy. He pines for the word of God like a lover.

Psalms 119 is an acrostic poem, very elaborate, broken into 22 stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each verse of each stanza begins with one of these letters in the sequence. Thus each of the first eight verses begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph – the next 8 verses begin with the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of the alphabet and so on. I don't know Hebrew, so you will need to verify this on your own.

It describes LIFE under the covenant of God. And the covenant bears fruit; very good fruit. It teaches us not only to know that we are loved, but how to live in the freedom that God's love provides.

### **Living THE Covenant**

Note that the first eight verses are not burdened with an instructive style (no graphs or charts), rather they are written in a devout manner – like a "life poem..." you can sense David's heart fellowship with God as he is communing with the soul through the Holy Spirit. Prayer and praise shine like the light through the trees and the holy emotion expresses itself powerfully.

The object of his love is God himself, and as he exacts this love in words that laud the work of God; primarily his saving covenant, which is described in God's word.

There are 8 synonyms for God's word in this Psalm; in English - law (torah), word (dabar), rulings or ordinances, commandments, statutes, precepts, charges, sayings, promise, way...

The sum of these only slightly veils the full gospel of Christ.

### **(V1)**

Verse 1 tells us that there is much delight in our hearts when we live our life according to the Word of God. It starts out in the same manner of Psalm 1 – which reads, "*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.*"

We don't see a good and evil as equal forces battling out for balance, but one that leads to life and the other to destruction. To know the word of God is not only to live life to the fullest but to avoid destruction.

The words on the page are not in themselves just words of instruction. They lead to salvation and to the power of God to keep us alive in our soul.

There is no other like it, though many have tried. Just read the book of Mormon...it's a real sleeper.

We see the whole of scripture and they all point in the same direction – not to some simple outward obedience, but to the person of Christ. He is on every page.

To love the word is to love Christ.

You hear much about social injustice and we invent so many ways to seek to end it, but we don't ponder the fullness of the law in the context of grace, we don't mine for truth, and so we destroy ourselves slowly, creating new ills while solving others (or not solving them). Then we surprise ourselves when the consequences of our actions bring destruction.

Yet when we say "law" to the world, it often brings about negative connotations as well as a lot of bad jokes about lawyers. It brings to mind a possible condemnation that lies ahead – or a standard that cannot be met, which is part of the point...

Yet to study this law, you see something that hints that there is more to it than rules on how to live, but a God who frees his people from slavery. It begs us to pursue a better understanding of God. It begins by saying, "God is good."

So this beatitude on scripture itself does just that. It comes from the perspective; God is good, his word is good, he gives life. Reverence for the word is reverence to God himself.

Dr. Boyce, in his series on this Psalm, brings up men who have delighted in this Psalm; "William Wilberforce, Henry Martyn, and others who memorized Psalm 119, mined its treasures and found daily salvation there. These men pursued true spirituality with fervency over time. They found that life is to be found in the word, and they lived that life - often through very painful circumstances. According to them, this psalm gave them much life force.

**Knowing and living God's word** - an idea mentioned in verse 1 and 2, and reinforced in vs. 3 and 4.

This verse tells us that the people are happiest are those who do nothing wrong. The world may call them "stuffy" or "do-gooders," but let's not forget - the world is also on anti-depressants.

I'm envious of the man who was well-trained and disciplined as a child, whose parents diligently nurtured his soul until he was emancipated. How much better off are they than those who learn later in life and are constantly cleaning up the mess they left behind them.

We look at this Psalm and see there is more than reading the word, but there is a human response, "walk, keep, obey, and learn..." I can buy a house, but if I do not move in the furniture, maintain the property, I cannot truly enjoy it.

We see a consistent theme of "enjoying" what is ours to enjoy. Holiness is happiness – and gives us a foretaste of heaven.

A believer who errs is still saved, but the joy of his salvation is not there to be savored. He is rescued but not enriched...or as Charles Spurgeon puts it, "Greatly borne, but not greatly blessed."

The holy life is a quiet advance, steadily towards heaven. Those who measure their lives according to the word are less confused as to how to conduct themselves. Its commandments are not grievous, not theoretically admirable & practically absurd – they are perfect – and God enables His people to see them and to obey them.

Knowing the law, we can see that temptation becomes an opportunity to please heaven and fill ourselves up with joy. We can walk past it and rejoice – saying, “I did it! Yet it was not me, but Christ in me.”

Those who succumb to temptation are not familiar with this joy – *or are they familiar with temptation itself because they don't live with it long enough to see it through.* But the solution is here, the surest way to abstain from evil is to be fully occupied in doing good.

## V2

We see that an outward life is supported by an inward zeal. The more we seek after God, the more we are inspired to do so all the more. And this is not temporary like a New Year's resolution; the reference here is for life. There is never a time when God's word does not apply.

Your walk indicates your desires; a businessman arouses himself to do much business and will even lose much sleep in doing so. He does it because he loves it.

If you are mocking the idea of hearing and obeying, then you have already veered – you have told yourself already that you are not interested in pursuing this life – or pure joy...and one cannot walk this path unsupported by one's desires. In fact; to walk outwardly and not inwardly gives bitterness to the spirit. You can't hold out very long...

But grace and reverence causes you to reach out, in due time, to God himself – and when you find him, you want more of him. To love Christ is to admire virtue. To admire virtue is to walk towards obtaining it.

God's precepts require careful obedience – it doesn't happen by accident. Some give to God a careless service, a sort of hit-or-miss obedience; but the Lord has not commanded such service, and he won't accept it either. His law demands the love of all our heart, soul, mind and strength; a careless religion has none of these. Yet we often fail – even when we try.

In verse 5, we read “O THAT.” It is a sigh to the Lord from a man who has broken the law. At the same time that we know David is praising the word of God through the perspective of Grace. We know the name Bathsheba – that he has not merited God's favor, but that he has received it anyway.

This cry, “O THAT...” is as acceptable a prayer as “Our Father.” There is little difference.

We cannot keep the law perfectly and must resort to prayer. To walk without praying is like taking a cup to the fountain but keeping the cup away from the running water. It's there for the taking, but you remain thirsty.

In contrast, however, we drink instead from the cup of false Euphoria and fantasy. We delay our prayers or ignore them all together. Yet even David sigh's with regret. It's a cry of weakness from a man who has often chosen a dirty lover over a divine groom.

The shepherd knew he needed a rod to show the way and a staff to support him. He begs God for that staff.

A good walk is a walk that is supported by prayer.

(V 6) – “then I will never be put to shame.”

Some think they are familiar with temptation, but they really mean they are familiar with shame. They do not live with temptation long enough to become intimate with it.

David is writing from the perspective of one who is familiar with shame, has experienced it and desires to avoid it again – and like a husband longing for his wife when he is away at war is a sinner longing for righteousness. 1000 virtues mean nothing to a mind that is feeling the weight of 1-single failing.

We have all gotten a taste of shame at some point in our life. It buries us in despair and makes us feel that we will never be delivered from it...like we can never lift our face again.

Paul, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing...So I find this law at work; When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. Romans 7:15, 18-19, 21-23.

Life for even an Apostle is a struggle. Although we want to keep the law of God, we do not keep it and, in fact, cannot keep it, at least not in our own power.

So David ponders this as in a prayer...he says, “I don't want that shame near me ever again... He is drawing strength in the “O THAT” so that he can enjoy THIS.

Read these words, “Then I will not be ashamed.” It is a promise. The Holy Spirit is renewing you in the image of God so that you can look up without fear and say with a calm resolve that it is well with my soul.

**V8** – I will obey your decrees.

This is both a promise to himself and a promise from God. You sense a plea in verse 5 that moves towards action in vs 8. But that action itself comes with a plea. “O Lord, I will obey you, but I have already failed you. Do not forsake me but give me strength.”

That plea is 1-part calm resolve, 1-part fear.

David knew that though he will pursue the law imperfectly, he will cling to the grace that is promised in the word, which is part of the law. Deeply rooted in the word is the concept of atonement, and David was very intimate with it.

To know the word, read the word, live the word, it to recognize that the promise of the perfect inheritance is already guaranteed and that this just God would take David's sins elsewhere. It's all about living in the peace that is ours by right, so that we can say:

**It is well with my soul.**

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!<sup>3</sup>

So we see a sharp descent from benediction in verse 1 to verse 8, which almost wails...showing a gracious growth; from admiration of the good he moves to a burning longing after God, then he pines for communion with him – fettered with an intense horror should it not be enjoyed.

**We need his strength to pursue this life.**

**And may he grant it to you.**

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<sup>3</sup> "It is Well With My Soul," *Horatio Spafford*.