

The Word
Psalm 119:25-32
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If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Psalm 119. Today, we're going to be looking at verses 25 through 32. As we're doing our summer series in the book of Psalms, it's not so much a two-part series. But I wanted to look at last week's sermon from Psalm 29 with today's Psalm 119, kind of side by side, to look at, from last week, the voice of the Lord and how the voice is powerfully present, like a thunderstorm, which is very poetic imagery. And this morning, we consider how the power of the Lord's voice is also very precise and is very present in His word.

So let us read from Psalm 119:25-32 this morning. Hear the word of the Lord.

My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word! When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes! Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word! Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law! I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me. I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame! I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart! [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Let us pray.

Our Father, would you add to the reading of your word. Would you encourage us and strengthen us, revive us by your word this morning? We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

Perhaps for either Mother's Day or Father's Day, maybe you got one of those wonderful acrostic poems. And maybe you were the author of one of those wonderful acrostic poems. Now, you know what an acrostic poem is even if you don't know what that word is. I'm going to give you an example. "Mothers, mothers are best. Open hearts, teaching minds, helping hands, encouraging words. Really, mothers are best." An acrostic poem is what we have here in Psalm 119. It is a way to structure the poem in a way that either each line begins with a word that spells a word, perhaps.

In the instance that we have here in Psalm 119, which is the longest psalm in the book, each stanza of eight lines begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And the stanza that we're looking at this morning begins with the sound that's equivalent to our letter "D." The flow of this stanza is quite beautiful. I almost encourage you to spend several years studying Hebrew just to—and I don't even read it. It's just amazing to look at the structure and the simplicity and the beauty of what it's doing in its sounds and what it's doing in its transitions. So I hope to do it justice this morning.

Each line has symmetry. Each line contains parallel structures, parallel words. And we see the psalmist walking through a very prayerful formational process. And in some ways, that is one of the benefits and the purposes of the psalms as the hymnbook of God's people is that we would be shaped by them, we would be instructed by them, our very souls being molded in a way that reflects God's character.

And looking at the word this morning, we see that throughout these verses, and the word is an invitation to know the creator and the redeemer. The word is also a mirror to view ourselves in relationship to that creator and redeemer. And specifically in Psalm 119 and as we talk about these verses, the word of God is the very way of life.

And so as we look at these eight lines, we're going to break it up into three sections. The first section is verses 25 through 27. We're going to look at how the word of God brings life. The second section is in verses 28 and 29 of how the word of God invites repentance. And then lastly, verses 30 through 32 will look at how the word of God empowers location.

So as we look at verses 25 through 27 first, we see how the word of God brings life. Now, here, I just want to pause briefly and give some back story. The psalm in its entirety, Psalm 119, has roughly eight different words that it uses as synonyms to describe and explain and give praise to the word of God, and there's seven of them in this stanza.

So just briefly walking through this, the word "word" is just a general term for speech, and it embraces all of God's truth presented. Your translation might use the word "statutes," which speaks of the binding force of scripture, as of the very laws of God engrained on the tablets of stone. His "precepts" is a word that is related to the term that talks about an officer or an overseer. And in this way, it carries a sense that such a person is giving such special and careful attention to his responsibilities. And so here with the precepts, it's referring to God's responsibilities that He's giving to His people.

The word "law" is used. This is perhaps the term that's most used throughout the psalm, and it means to give direction or instruction. And so the word "law" is sometimes a challenging word to interpret in all of scripture because it can mean different things. For example, coming from God, it can mean either His laws, which could reference one or several laws, or it could reference the totality of His law, such as all of scripture. But it also can carry a sense of just referring to God's revelation. His revealed will is His law. His law is His word. Who He is is His word. And those things are very woven together.

"Rules" in verse 30—which depending on your translation may use the word "judgments" or "ordinances." But here, it's in reference to the Lord, who is all wise and all righteous as a judge. And the psalmist here is describing the word of God as the standard for fair dealing with one another. His "testimonies" refer, again, in a slightly different way to the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, which were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. Here, as testimonies, it's serving as a witness of God's own affirmation in His divine law. This word expresses those high standards and also those clear warnings of scripture that bear witness to the truth of God, and in some places, it bears witness against the people.

"Commandments" brings us to the last word that we'll briefly discuss this morning. Commandments emphasize the authority of what is said. You see, the Lord has the right to give such commands, to give such orders for His people to follow by right of who He is.

And so though these words are distinct from one another, and they carry different nuances of meaning, in poetry, it's important to ask why the psalmist uses so many different words. For example, do they refer to different categories? Are there things we can define out and then go over here and say, "Well, this is a precept, and this is a testimony, this is a statute"? And it's not so much that. Now, in the Pentateuch, though, there are sometimes distinctions that are made. But they're being made to describe the difference between, for example, the law of the ten words and the statutes that are the explanations and kind of the unrolling of those ten laws, those ten commands. But in poetry, using such language and having turns of phrases, and kind of the play on words, and having different words to mean similar things is a way to engage the heart. It's a way to engage the mind so that we would be drawn into what the psalmist is referring to and bringing us in to understand what's happening.

I think the scholar Derek Kidner helps here. He suggests that we should probably not look for each to show its distinct character at each occurrence, to not lose track or get lost in the forest for the trees, if you will. But rather, to contribute by its frequent arrival that it's adding to our total

understanding of what scripture is. So it's the word giving life.

The opening lines in verses 25 through 27 in some ways are directing the psalmist in the sense of a prayer to the Lord. And we get a glimpse of his state of mind. Verse 25 has this poetic wordplay with the words "soul" and "dust" and "life." When he says, "My soul clings to the dust," it's capturing an experience of humiliation, of sitting or just laying in the loose dry earth, parched, no life, no moisture. There's nothing there, and it's almost like peanut butter to the roof of your mouth. You're clinging to that dust. The poetic irony is that he is not experiencing life in the very substance from which he comes, "dust," as these words conjure our imagination in Genesis. Rather, the psalmist begins pleading to find life according to the word of the one by whom he was created.

And so the psalmist keeps moving. Verse 26, he speaks of ways. "I told of my ways," in verse 27, "the way of your precepts." Here, "ways" is another theme of these verses. The way is meaning traveling, journeying along. Metaphorically, it can mean how a person leads their life in their character and in their conduct. And here in verse 26, he is telling the Lord of his ways. It's an open, honest acknowledgement from his vantage point of telling the Lord about how I'm going about my way. But the psalmist is also open to listen from the Lord's vantage point.

In his devotional on the Book of Psalms called *The Songs of Jesus*, pastor and writer Tim Keller says this. "Contemporary people tend to examine the Bible looking for things they can't accept. But Christian should reverse that, allowing the Bible to examine us looking for things God can't accept." Now, I think that certainly can be true. But I also think we tend to value the snapshot of our own experience in the moment over pursuing the trajectory of following the Lord over a lifetime, what author and pastor Eugene Peterson calls "the long obedience in the same direction."

The snapshot of our moments seems to be very disorienting at times and fragmenting. Life seems a little bit topsy turvy at times. Perhaps—and I don't know your heart, but I invite you to explore it. Perhaps you feel stifled by the old roads, and you experience kind of a reversal. You experience a comfort in exploring the detours. Or maybe some of you are so used to the old roads that you've forgotten what it looks like to be a guide for someone else along the path. Having the word of God bring life according to His word helps us explore and understand our ways.

And so let us go further as the psalmist does as he listens to the Lord's response. In doing so, he's redirecting his focus. He goes from his vantage point to having the compass bearing change. Redirect my attention. Redirect my focus upon your vantage point. He is now able to see where he is in the moment and where he is heading.

So what redirects his focus? The psalmist wants to learn the Lord's statutes. He wants to understand the very responsibilities the Lord has given His people. There is a subject matter, if you will. And this subject matter is tied very tightly to a person. But it's directing his mind and heart and intentions to have that refocused, for that to be his refocus.

And how? How does he refocus? Well, in verse 27, look there. "I will meditate on your wondrous works." He doesn't get burdened by focusing on the responsibilities themselves, but rather he's seeking wisdom through the careful study of all of God's great acts of judgment and redemption, that He exercises with His people this covenant relationship of what He does in saying, "I am the creator, and I have come near and come close to you, and I have brought you out of slavery, out of the land of Egypt. And I am your God, and you will be my people." This is the heartbeat of our God making covenant with His people and being in close relationship with them. He wants to learn. He wants to be accustomed to God's ways by pondering God's amazing works. How great is our God?

We did that this morning. We meditated on His wondrous works by singing words of how great

our God is. We are lifted up to ponder how wondrous are His ways? How wondrous is His salvation? So I want you to say those words to yourself. Dare I say to say it out loud. "I will meditate on your wondrous works. I will meditate on your wondrous works."

There can be healthy benefits to something like mindfulness or meditative practices. Scripture speaks of meditation that involves a musing, a considering, a studying, a contemplating, a prayerful understanding. Meditation in scripture is not emptying your thoughts and connecting to the universe. It is filling your mind and being in communion with the living God. It's Romans 12, having our minds renewed.

So does this capture your imagination? Do you have vocabulary? Do you have experience where you are pondering these things? Are you familiar with scripture's story of God's work of creation and God's work of redemption? Are you growing in understanding those things? We're all students. We're all learning. But I ask you are you growing in those things? Are you increasing in your knowledge? Are you developing your understanding? Is there a heart-filled devotion in seeing how all scripture is breathed out by God? All scripture is profitable for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work, from 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Or do we have our imaginations shaped by that great event? Do we see ourselves? Do we share it with others, like the conversation on the road to Emmaus, where all of scripture is interpreted in light of Jesus Christ, can we wax eloquently, not because it sounds good but because we understand it? We digest the word of God in a way that we understand how it fits together. And what is the story? What is the message that our great God is communicating about Himself and about what He's doing?

How would you like to grow, brothers and sisters, in meditating upon the Lord's wondrous works? Who could you ask for help? Who could you guide in the way of the Lord?

This examination from these verses brings us very naturally into the further progression in verses 28 and 29 where we see how the word of God invites repentance. The psalmist says, "My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!" He's starting with his vantage point. His "soul melts away for sorrow." The picture is like a dripping, even a weeping for grief. And he could be describing an experience of tears, but flowing out of verse 25, the psalmist is describing how his strength is poured out like water. And he's intensifying the experience that he has of clinging to the dust. When you get peanut butter on the roof of your mouth, what do you want? You want water. What happens if you don't have water? It's stuck on the roof of your mouth for a little bit. And so the psalmist is describing this experience with such melting that there's not any strength anymore to cling to the dust.

But the psalmist again redirects his focus upon the word of the Lord. Just as the Lord brings life in verse 25, so here the word revives our strength. And he goes further. "Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!" He's inviting the Lord to be the cause of his turning. Sometimes we think of repentance as, "I've got to get there so I can repent." I've got to get to the place where I feel it or where I understand it." Or "I'm not ready yet." But here he's crying out for the Lord to be the cause of his turning away from his deceptions, his betrayals, his fraud, any wrongdoing, and all falsehood so that he might be able to turn to the Lord.

Pause here and think about that. The psalmist invites the Lord to examine his ways. Just in verse 26, he does that. And here he's inviting the Lord to move in him repentance, verse 29. Do you think this way? Do you inquire of the Lord this way? And if you don't, it's okay. It's part of the journey. But what holds you back? What prevents you from experiencing this process of examination. And it's not just your examination. It's a two-way examination. It's bringing yourself to the word and having the word examine you. Sometimes we maintain the paths we are on because they are familiar, and they're well-

worn. Getting out of the path can be scary to think about because the journey is different, maybe unknown. And sometimes, we would prefer to be back where we know to go forward with what we don't know, even if maybe we have the assurance that it's safe, that it's actually the better path. While getting out of the path can be scary, getting stuck on the path can be discouraging. To try to get on a new path with your own mind, your own intellect, read a new book, have another commentary, read another blog post, the way we can see a better way, a new way. Our old ways haven't been working, so we need to try something different. We might muster our strength to do such, or we might think if we have a thick enough wallet, we can make it to the destination.

But just as Paul writes in Romans 2 that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance, this psalmist asks the Lord to show him gracious favor. That phrase, "graciously teach me your law" is an imperative. He's saying, "Show me favor. Show me favor." And he's connecting that to the Lord's law. He connects His grace shown with His word.

Lastly, as we look at verses 30 through 32 this morning, the word of God empowers vocation. So what do I mean? So as you look there, this is a process of examination. This is a pursuit of wisdom and understanding from the word of God. And so notice how the psalmist has a new direction in his life with his steps. Hear what he says. Coming out of repentance in 28 and 29, he's shifting. "I have chosen the way of faithfulness. I set your rules before me. I cling to your testimonies, O Lord." He's switched peanut butter brands. "I cling to your testimonies, O Lord. Let me not be put to shame. I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart." One commentator said this. "The sequence of prayers is happening here," at verse 27, where he goes from, "let me understand," to "strengthen me," to "keep me," to "be gracious to me." "Do not let me be put to shame." And this sequence that's shaping his heart is moving and overlapping in a way where it impacts his steps. "I have chosen. I have set my heart. I hold fast. I run." And all of these things that he is doing is based on the assurances God's word has given him despite his circumstances.

Because you can do a further study of who might be the author, not so much an exact person, but what are the circumstances of the psalmist who wrote Psalm 119. There are pictures of persecution or mockery. There's a picture of being misunderstood by the family of God, even. And so despite his circumstances in the face of dread and the vacuous abyss, and even the potential for shame, the psalmist seeks to be revived by the Lord. He seeks to be revived and walk forward in the light of God's way by ordering his life according to God's purposes. It's important to follow that progression because if we get it backwards, we start resting in ourselves. If we get it backwards, we think we're doing good, and we've never done anything with God. And it's not out of the grace that actually is compelling us to grow in His ways. Having that progression in the right path matters.

We don't choose and we don't walk out of our competencies. We don't choose and we don't walk out of our strength. And John Calvin says something really well here as a helpful reminder regarding these verses. "The psalmist reminds us that the proper observance of the law consists not merely in external works. It's not just doing. But it demands willing obedience so that the heart must, to some extent, and in some way, enlarge itself." So do you here that? It's not doing them, and that's what enlarges the heart. Not that it has the self-determining power of doing this, but once its hardness and obstinacy are subdued, it moves freely without being any longer contracted by its own narrowness.

Finally, this passage tells us when God has once enlarged our hearts, there will be no lack of power, because along with proper affection, He will furnish ability so that our feet will be ready to run. Does this somehow pit the word of God against the living God, the living word? Is there somehow some separation from the voice of the Lord and the word of God, for instance. Not at all. Is there some way that the written word is deficient from the living word? Absolutely not. If you flip over to John 1:1-5,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [ESV]

Later in the gospel of John, Jesus says this in chapter 14, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father, also. From now on, you know him, and you have seen him." The voice of the Lord and the word of the Lord, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is how we have the assurances of God's faithfulness and God's truth. It's speaking to you today. You don't have to read signs. You don't have to pick out the patterns. Just open up your Bible.

Peter says this in 2 Peter 1 starting at verse 16.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place. [ESV]

Does that sound familiar? Psalm 119:105.

Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. [ESV]

The Lord is faithful, and His word is trustworthy. Every generation needs to be disciplined in the way of Jesus. Every generation needs to grow in understanding the very written word that we have access to in probably 30 Bibles in your pocket, 5 or 6 on your shelf. The Bible is sufficient. The Bible is powerful as we know God through it, and we know ourselves.

Derek Kidner, the scholar I mentioned earlier, says this as well. "This untiring emphasis has led some to accuse the psalmist of worshipping the word rather than the Lord. But it has been well-remarked that every reference here to scripture without exception relates it explicitly to its author." Indeed, every verse from Psalm 119:4 to the end is a prayer or affirmation addressed to Him. This is true piety, a love of God not desiccated by study, but refreshed and formed and nourished by it.

Friends, we've only looked at the one stanza in Psalm 119 this morning. I invite you to spend even today, spend your Sabbath day looking at Psalm 119 and just letting each stanza just wash over you. Repeat it. Sing it. Stop. Journal. Write. Speak. Ponder. Think about it. Slow down and digest God's word. The voice of the Lord thunders like the storm with its power, but the word gives life with the precision of God's ways. As the author of Hebrews says, "It is living and active. The word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, or joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." It's how David can say, "Search me, O God. See if there is any grievous way in me, and may I know your ways."

May the word of God bring you life this day. May the word of God invite you into this path of

repentance that is painful at times, but it's freeing. And may the word of God empower your very vocation in life to the things, to the tasks, to the people that the Lord has put in your life. There may be seasons where you cling to the dust, but the living word holds you fast. Let's pray.

Lord, help us by your Spirit to rejoice and to be filled by the truth of your word. May we be compelled to know you through it. May it sharpen our minds. May it quicken our spirits. Lord, and may it equip us to walk in ways that give you glory and honor, certainly as praise to you. But may we live in ways that are glorifying to you and how we live in front of others and with each other. May we be shaped according to your word. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.