

Psalm 119, the importance of God's word Verses 161 – 176, Shin & Tau

Welcome to our last talk in this series, The importance of God's Word. We are going to consider the final two stanzas of this psalm which cover the last two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, Shin and Tau. Shin has the meaning of tooth or teeth with both negative and positive connotations. Tau has the meaning of a cross and this was seen on the coinage of the Maccabees, a Jewish family, which for a time succeeded in giving the Jewish people national freedom, throwing off the rule and oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes.

All scriptures quoted are taken from the New King James version unless otherwise stated.

Penultimate stanza verses 161 – 168, Shin.

Let us read this stanza, Shin, verses 161 to 168, with the meaning of a tooth or teeth.

“Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word.
I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure.
I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law.
Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments.
Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.
LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments.
My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly.
I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You.”

Earlier I mentioned that this stanza has both negative and positive considerations. The negative is seen in verse 161, being persecuted by others, and in verse 163 the writer hates those who are liars. In every dispensation the godly are persecuted by the ungodly. Lying is a characteristic of those who are controlled by Satan. He is the father of lies. It is one of the facts of life for a believer, that persecution can occur at any time and for no other reason than that he or she is a believer in the one true God and His Son Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ warned that His followers would have persecution in the world. Therefore, let us not be surprised when trouble comes our way for no other reason than that we belong to Christ, our Saviour and Lord. On the other hand, the psalmist has confidence in such situations. If rulers, that is the princes, persecute without a cause he has a 'but'. The psalmist is focused upon God's Word. His inner being, his heart, the place of affection, has due reverence for the Scriptures. In the book of Hebrews, we are told that the word of God is living and powerful. Time and again God's word gives guidance for every circumstance, assesses situations to the minutest detail and pinpoints exactly what is required in any situation. This should guide us as to how we react to the persecution.

The second negative is an almost universal characteristic of unbelievers, that of lying. Lying can often be a means of self-gain or avoiding responsibilities. In John chapter 8, the Lord Jesus declares that the source of lying is Satan. If we listen to Satan, remember Adam and Eve, we will reject God's word and this will lead to rejecting God's principles, given to govern behaviour, how

we live and interact with other people. As Christians, we are required to be open and truthful, not just with other Christians but with everyone. Again, the psalmist has the answer, "I love your law." He cleaves to God's word and desires to live by what he reads in the Scriptures. These are the negative and destructive aspects of this stanza and easily identified with the meaning of Shin as teeth.

The remainder of the stanza is positive, and we will consider these aspects next. We may consider the meaning of 'Shin' (teeth) as tenaciously holding onto that which is positive. God's word brings joy to the psalmist's heart. He rejoices and he finds treasure in the Scriptures. This treasure is likened to the spoils of war when victory has been achieved by a conquering army. You may think this is a strange consideration but let us consider that if we are to gain any real appreciation of God's word, then it will take effort. It will cost us time and energy to study the Scriptures. We are surely reminded of Psalm 45, which speaks of God's King. "My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore, God has blessed You forever." The writer of Psalm 45 came to those conclusions because he was occupied with his God and the Scriptures.

Coming to verse 164 the writer of the Psalm states, "Seven times a day I praise You." The use of number seven is interesting. Seven is a prime or cardinal number. It reminds us of the seven days in a week, six days of creation and the seventh when God rested from His work. We might then say that the writer of the psalm had a perfect appreciation that praise belongs to God. He praises because he understands that God's ways and decisions are right – "Because of Your righteous judgments." We also see that this is a daily activity to give praise to God. It should not be confined to a Sunday! This is a challenge to all Christians. Do we have things about which we can give praise every day? Are we thankful daily? One reason the psalmist had cause to praise was God's righteous judgments.

Sometimes we might read the Scriptures and find things are difficult to understand and not in line with current social, moral and political thinking. The challenge to us, as it was to the psalmist, is to fall in line with God's word, no matter how different and possibly unpopular it might be with the trends of the world. The world judges itself by its own and changing standards but we must judge ourselves by God's standards. The unbelieving world is moving towards condemnation, whereas believers are moving towards the eternal scene of the Father's house; read John 14.

In the next verse we read, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." Great peace may be considered as great safety. Safety is found in the word of God. God's word guides through the paths of life, see verse 105 of this Psalm, a lamp to the feet and a light to the path - prevention from stumbling, tripping and falling.

This is followed by "LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments." The psalmist hopes or waits for the salvation or deliverance that can only be fully realised by his God, Jehovah. Part of that deliverance is due to the writer heeding the warnings, the commandments not to do or follow specifically forbidden situations. The Garden of Eden is where we find the first of these commandments – do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Disobedience led to disaster as far as mankind was concerned. Every wise prohibition in God's word when disobeyed has brought about disaster in some measure. The world ignores God to its peril and Christians when failing to follow God's word find themselves in difficulty.

Verse 167 states, "My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly." God's word is not only 'Do's and Do not's', it gives us a revelation of Himself. God is 'Holy' and God is 'Love'. An appreciation of this and God's many other attributes of His divine nature are to instruct the believer

and they help us to understand why God teaches through His word. The purpose is to conform us to His marvellous ways of blessing so that we see the importance of loving the Scriptures.

In the last verse of this stanza we are brought to the conclusion that God wants His people to know Him, "I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies." This verse ends with the psalmist realising that his God knows the future. For a safe and secure future avoiding the unnecessary failures of life we need to be conscious that, "For, all my ways are before You." Happy is the person who seeks to leave the future entirely in God's hands. How much more so, we in this dispensation, who know both the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father and have a better relationship than the Old Testament saints ever had. We can leave our whole life in the hands of our loving Saviour!

The last stanza, verses 169 - 176, Tau.

We now come to the last stanza of Psalm 119. This stanza is marked by the Hebrew letter 'Tau' and it is said to represent the sign of a cross, although the letter when written does not look like a cross. However, the Jewish family of Maccabees produced their own coinage, on which the letter 'Tau' is represented by a cross. The cross speaks of suffering and in this last stanza the writer speaks about suffering and the need for help. The psalmist no doubt was relating to his own suffering and his distressing situations. Prophetically we can see that the stanza speaks to us of our Lord Jesus Christ. The end of His life in this world was by crucifixion.

Let us read the next stanza from verse 169.

"Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word.
Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word.
My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes.
My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.
Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts.
I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight.
Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgments help me.
I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments."

In verse 169, a common theme of the psalm is taken up by the psalmist, "Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word." There is the desire in the writer to know more and have a better understanding of God's word. This is the word to give instruction for life, how to live right for God in this world. We might well align this verse with Paul's instruction to Timothy in his second letter chapter 2, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (KJV).

Verse 170 states, "Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word." The cry now becomes a plea, a supplication for God to be gracious, in order that the psalmist might be rescued from his situation. Whatever the problem, we are not told what, deliverance must be according to God's word. I am reminded of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done." As the Lord bowed to the will of His Father so we too need to submit to the word of God - God's revealed will for us.

As we have seen dependence upon God, we now see confidence in the following two verses, 171 and 172, "My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness." First, we have an outpouring of praise from the writer - no doubt thankfulness in his heart and confidence of a positive response from his God. The writer of Psalm 111 has a similar burst of praise when he wrote, "I will praise the LORD with

my whole heart." This is followed by an appreciation of God's word, specifically statutes or principles that are always to be observed. The writer is thankful for godly instruction. Living according to God's word gives daily guidance. It is a defence against evil; it delights the heart of God and gives assurance to the believer.

What was true in the psalmist's day is still true in our day. Praise is directed towards God, but we must also have a testimony towards our fellow man. This is expected from a Christian. So, the psalmist and we ourselves must be ready to speak God's word. People will only know what God expects by making God's word known. Salvation is only by accepting Christ as Saviour. In order to do this, we must recognise our total sinfulness and that we cannot earn a place in heaven and thereby escape God's righteous judgment. Salvation is totally and solely dependent upon the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and our acceptance of the fact that He died for me. In the final part of these two verses we find the psalmist recognising that he has a responsibility to follow God's instruction; it is a commandment that is enjoined upon him. If we proclaim God's word, then we must support what we say by how we live. The righteousness of God's word made it important for believers in the psalmist's day, and for those who say they are Christians, to live by the scriptures.

Verse 173 states, "Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts." The psalmist recognises his responsibility because of his conscious decision to abide by God's precepts. But at the same time, he also recognises that to be effective in those responsibilities he needs God's assistance. As part of Adam's race, even though we know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we are still frail and far from capable in ourselves. It is good therefore to depend upon God to support and direct each one of us in living out the Christian life. In the next verse the psalmist states, "I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight." The longing has been an ongoing desire and it is focused upon Jehovah's salvation.

We might simply view salvation as deliverance from an unwanted experience. However, salvation here also includes the thoughts of prosperity and victory. This may well have a more future application and as far as Christians are concerned, we can consider victory in more than one way. The Lord Jesus accomplished a victory as the One who gave His life and shouted with triumph, "It is finished." This was in connection with sin, meeting a holy God's righteous demands and as the substitute for each person who accepts Jesus as their own personal Saviour. In addition, Christians wait the fulness of salvation which is the rapture event when all believers, those who have died and those currently alive, will be caught up to meet the Lord Jesus in the air. From that grand meeting, He will conduct us into His Father's house.

When a Christian dies, his or her body is placed in a grave and it is considered asleep. The spirit and soul, the non-physical part of our being, go to be with Christ, which the apostle Paul describes as a condition which is far better. No doubt the psalmist has the same kind of considerations when he writes, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise You." The psalmist did not have the full understanding of God's purposes and ways and was unaware of the revelations that have been unfolded in the New Testament. So, when we consider the Old Testament from a Christian viewpoint we do so with a measure of a fuller understanding of God's intentions. David in Psalm 6 wrote, "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" Even David who was close to the Lord realised that death cut off the conscious ability to communicate praise. But the psalmist closes with the realisation that God always has the last word for every situation as he states, "Let Your judgments help me." God's decisions are final even though we desire that those decisions would be helpful to us in our lives. The psalmist is not looking for death but for a continuance of a life of praise. Christians, look forward to a heavenly scene at the rapture when praise and worship will be taken up in those realms above.

With our final verse, 176, the psalmist once again recognises the tendency to go astray when he writes, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments." In this verse we are reminded of the parable of the lost sheep, but we must also consider the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, see John 10. Without the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus there would be no salvation. As we close this psalm, we see that the writer does not forget God's commandments. The New Testament teaches how we can be saved from the judgment due to sinners. Salvation is only found in Jesus and in no other person or the rituals of any religion. The blessing of eternal life is a gift from Jesus the Son of God to those who accept Him as Saviour.

As we draw this series to a close, we have endeavoured to show the 'Importance of God's Word', our series title. This series commenced in September 2017. During our consideration of Psalm 119 we have highlighted the various words employed to describe the subtle meanings the psalmist used to describe the word of God, for example commandments, law, precepts and so forth. Additionally, we have seen the commitment expressed by the psalmist, his reliance upon his God and the necessity of seeking always the resource found in Jehovah his God. In parallel we have endeavoured to link the teaching of the psalm to our everyday experience as Christians.

The first stanza involved the Hebrew letter 'Aleph' with the meaning of an Ox. This teaches us of the perfect servant our Lord Jesus Christ. The last stanza involved the Hebrew letter 'Tau' with the meaning of the cross. Again, this would speak to us of the crucifixion, the mighty sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ to make redemption available to lost mankind.

Those who are involved in Truth for Today trust that our listeners have been encouraged by this series. Thank you for listening to this broadcast, talk number 1135 on the last two stanzas of Psalm 119.

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