

The Power of the Word of God

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Psalm 119

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Bible Text: Psalm 119:9-16
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This morning I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Psalms chapter 119. The book of Psalms is typically right there in the middle of your Bibles and as you're turning to Psalm 119 you will discover if not already known that this is the longest chapter in all of the Bible, 176 verses that are divided into 22 respective sections of eight verses each. That is why when you open to Psalm 119, you may see a host of characters and words that you don't quite know what they mean in between these various stanzas, those are the respective letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and they are utilized to divide this chapter in its respective sections. And this is important because the primary emphasis, the primary subject matter of Psalm 119 is the importance and the possible impact that the word of God can and should have in our lives.

As we turn to Psalm 119 today, we're going to begin in verse 9. If you're a guest or visitor with us or maybe haven't worshiped with us in some while, I want to welcome you to a journey, a journey through one quote respective chapter of the Bible. But more than that, this is a journey for us to understand what God intended his words to always be in our lives. Before we begin reading in verse 9 though, I do want to call very specific attention to today's title. I've entitled today "The Power of the Word of God." Now, one of the things that you may notice, particularly on the screen or the lower third if you're watching online, is that the word "word" is not capitalized. I want you to hear me very clearly, that is not somehow relegating the Bible as less than or not as important as it should be. That's a very important theological distinction. Allow me to clarify. In the gospel of John, chapter 1, it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That is specifically referencing whom we know as Jesus Christ. And more often than not, within the Bible, when you see the word "Word" capitalized, it's a direct reference to Jesus. When you see it with a lowercase "w," it is speaking of the scriptures. And so again, I want you to understand, in my flesh, I want to capitalize it because it should be that important but at the same time, we need to make a distinction between when we're talking of Jesus and when we're talking of the word.

Second thing I want to call your attention to is the word "power." Today when we talk about the power of the word of God, the capacity, the veracity, the potential that it has in our life, this is one of those things that we recognize that cerebrally; there's a part of us today that we just kind of inherently know that. However, we must confess and we must

admit that the culture that the majority of us live in today has taken the power of God and the power of his word for granted. The average home in the United States of America has three Bibles within it. That's the average home. Now, my home has a whole lot of Bibles in it, so we kind of, you know, we equalize that, so to speak. But the reason I call your attention to that is whether you realize it or not, did you know that in over 50 countries right now, it is illegal to possess a copy of the Bible? In fact, you will not only be apprehended, you will not only be arraigned, there are some places where they will end your physical life just because you have a copy of it. Now I'm going to ask somewhat of a series of rhetorical questions here. If you obviously do not believe in the Bible, if you do not believe in the God of the Bible, if you do not believe in Jesus Christ whom the Bible claims he is, then what are you so scared of? If it's not true, then why ban it? If it's not true, why make it illegal? Let me tell you why these leaders in these countries have not just recently but for years made the Bible illegal, it's because they know the power it contains. They know that it alone has the ability to show us who the one true God is, how we can be saved from our sins, and where we can reside for all of eternity. See, the reason people don't want you to have access to the word of God is because it flies completely contrary to every ideology that fleshly man can inherently dream of or propagate and today, it may not be illegal in our country but it has become vastly ignored.

And so today, beginning in verse 9, let's look at the power that the word of God can and should have in our lives. It says,

9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. 10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. 11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. 12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. 13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. 14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. 16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Eight very simplistic verses, as are all the stanzas in Psalm 119, but these verses specifically convey to us the power, the capacity that the word of God can and should have in our lives and it begins with addressing a very specific quote "who." Notice what it says, how shall a young man cleanse his ways? Now one thing you may or may not be familiar with within the context of scripture is that within the Bible, the Lord classifies humanity in one of seven respective, what we might call, growth stages. The Bible speaks of babes, little children, children, young men, fathers, elders, and for those of you who really want to stretch it out, the aged. Those are the seven quote stages or development that the Bible utilizes to convey to us where we find ourselves respectively in life.

So today in a context such as this, very few of us, at least those watching, listening my voice would be considered babes and there are some little children and children among us, but most of us find ourselves either in this adolescence part of life and/or beyond. Interesting of those seven stages, young men happen to be right in in the middle and the reason this is important, the reason this terminology is strategic isn't just the "who," but

it's the "what." Notice what it says. Verse 9, it says, "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his ways?" We speak of these, quote, physical stages of development, that's rightfully so, but more importantly, the problem that we discover is not necessarily the physical growth, though it is there, it is the spiritual growth where we find ourselves. In fact, in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 1, we discover that the Israelites have made their way finally out of Egypt after 400 plus years. They've made their way through the Red Sea. God has miraculously drowned out the Egyptians, saved the Israelites. They find themselves in what we will collectively know as the wilderness. You realize that for 11 days, that's all it would have taken to get from what we know as the Red Sea all the way to the Promised Land. But you know, those 11 days were critical, they were vital because even though they had been removed from bondage, they began to do what humanity tends to do. They began to whine, gripe, moan, and scream and say, "Oh, we had it better when we're in Egypt." We discover there would be a generation, there would be a group of people who would not see the Promised Land and in Deuteronomy 1 verse 39, God qualifies that those who did not yet know the difference between good and evil, that they would be the ones that would be preserved.

You say, why is that so important to this? Because when the Bible uses the phrase "young man," particularly in 1 John chapter 2, it says a young man is one who has overcome the evil one, a young man is one who has discovered or seen how the enemy works behind the scenes. The problem is this, that with the exception possibly of some very young children that may be in our midst, the overwhelming majority of us had come to a point in life where we realize this place is broken. We realize that we don't have all the answers. In a strict biblical context, we realize we got a sin problem, that we have lived a life, we have spoken words, we have had thoughts that are contrary at best to the way, the word, and the will of God.

And it says, how can a young man, how can he cleanse his ways? You know, there's four what we call worldview or strategic questions. You may have never seen it systematized like this, but every one of us, before we leave Earth, has to answer these four questions. Where did I come from? What's the problem? How do I fix it? Where am I going. Verse 9 of Psalm 119 deals with the problem about what's wrong. How can a young man cleanse his ways? In other words, we as humanity realize we have a sin problem. We are not perfect. In our best days, we are as quote filthy rags. We don't only have a problem, we've got a propensity, notice what it says in the next verse, "With my whole heart I've sought thee: O Lord, let me not wander from thy commandments." So even though we have this sin problem, even though we have this problem of realizing that we are not clean and we don't have all the answers, when we get kind of focused on how to fix it we tend to wander.

Now ladies, I will speak from the male gender. Y'all may not struggle as much with this as we do. Guys, I never want to quote rewrite the Bible, but can I interpret the Bible in light of our male thinking, okay? "Lord, with my whole heart I have sought thee, but squirrel." Does that communicate? In other words, we mean well, we desire well, but it doesn't take much to distract us, does it? It doesn't take much to take a heart and a mind that desires to be focused and to just wander off. In fact today, we sang one of my

favorite hymns in the book, "Come Thou Fount of Our Blessing." It's one of those songs that every time I hear the tune just resonates within me. There's a verse in there that gets me every time, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." I think the reason, and I don't think I'm speaking in isolation, I think the reason that that is such a gut punch of a verse is because we've all been there. We've all been in that place where we've desired the things of God, but they've gone a-wandering. We've wanted the things of God, but it has, quote, gone a-wandering. What you may or may not realize is the young man who wrote that famous hymn, he was actually in the early stages of life. In fact, we might technically say he was a quote young man. He wrote those words because he did, as we all do, tend to wander. But here's the proverbial rest of the story that you may not know. He was a pastor. He was a communicator of God's word. But after 30 years, after 30 years of, quote, preaching and teaching the word of God, he began to wander. In fact, he began to embrace in his latter years some very frightening theological positions and it has been said of him that in his last years he caused more people to doubt the faith than to believe the faith. You know, as you look through your Bible, one of the things you may be surprised to find is that when you take these men and women who are highlighted, we're given their names. Did you know that less than 25% of them, less than 25% actually finish strong? You know why? We tend to wander, do we not?

And so we discover that we've got this sin problem, we've got this struggle, we wander, but here's the beautiful thing, beginning in verse 11, I mean, if this is not the verse of Psalm 119, I don't know what is, it tells us the "how." How can we course correct? How can we stay focused? How can we, quote, fix the problem? Notice the process, "Thy word have I hid in my heart." Now, can I tell you what the Bible does not say? You may need to look at it to make sure that I'm accurate here. Here's what the Bible does not say, "Thy word I have on the shelf just in case I need to go get it. Thy word I have on an app on my phone just in case I need it." No, it says, "Thy word have I quote hid in my heart," and that is why, ladies and gentlemen, that is why through this calendar year, we're making such an emphasis personally and corporately on scripture memorization, hiding it in our heart.

Let me give you a very apropos illustration. Luke chapter 4, as well as Matthew chapter 4, Jesus finds himself in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights and then we have recorded three very strategic temptations that Satan brings to him. You know what we do not see? We do not see Jesus said, "Hey, can you push pause for a moment, Satan, I got to go back to the synagogue and grab the scroll?" What does Jesus do? He quotes. He recites. He has what we know as the word of God hidden in his heart.

Now I want to call your attention to another aspect of that because I think this is one of the reasons that we struggle with scripture memorization. It's because we face a host of issues and a host of problems in life and oftentimes those issues are not specifically mentioned in the Bible and so therefore we hide the word of God in our heart, what if it doesn't apply to the specific situation? Let me illustrate what happens in Jesus' wilderness experience. The very first thing that Satan tempts him to do, you remember, right? Turn the rock into bread. Did you know that Jesus did not turn to Satan and say, "Do you not know it is written, thou shalt not turn rocks into bread." He didn't say that, did he? Did

you know the next temptation was to jump off the pinnacle of the temple? Jesus did not say, "The Bible says thou shalt not fall for that temptation to jump off the temple." What does Jesus do? He quotes the word of God, and I want you to hear very clearly, the word of God is sharper than two-edged swords. You don't have to be about a specific situation, you just have to quote the word of God and Satan shuts up and he leaves.

Now I know some of you may be surprised to hear what I'm about to say, but when life throws you temptation and life throws you struggles, I am convinced that if you quote a genealogy from 2 Chronicles, Satan has to shut up and leave because he cannot handle the word of God. And oftentimes we look at our lives and our subject matters and we say, well, I just, I want a passage or I want a chapter that relates. It all relates and here's the beautiful thing, the word of God in Ephesians 6 is called the sword of the Spirit. It's the only offensive weapon we've got.

But you know what the promise is? Look in verse 11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart," I love this next part, "so that I will not sin against thee." Now, I understand that we as humanity in our flesh, we tend to gravitate toward the things of the flesh and what we might collectively refer to as sin, but let me recall Jesus' very first sermon. Again, in Luke chapter 4, right after the temptation, he gathers there in the synagogue, he opens up the scroll of Isaiah to chapter 61 and makes this declaration, "I have come to set the captives free. I have come to take those that are in bondage and to release them." In other words, the promise that we have from God's word is this, that when we hide it in our heart, listen, that we will walk in freedom, we will walk in liberty. This is important because the petition is to ask of God to teach us.

Now, let me tell you why this is so important because we're talking about the "how" here. The process is we hide it in our heart. The promise is we won't sin against God, we'll have a clear conscience. The petition is, "God, I need your help and I'm going to tell you why, because it's hard." In fact, we talk about spiritual disciplines all the time, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, worship. I could go through a whole list but I'm going to go ahead and be transparent with you: the hardest thing in the world to do is to memorize scripture. It's tough. You say, I know it's hard. So that's why verse 12 is there. "Teach me, O God." If you approach scripture memorization of, okay, here are words, they're in a certain order and I gotta memorize them, you're in for a very long year. You know how you petition God? Teach me. Teach me how a genealogy can allow me to walk in glory. Teach me, O God, how a story about somebody I've never heard of in the Bible can speak to my life and allow me to glorify and honor you. In other words, the petition is, "Teach me, O God, thy statutes."

And so we have the "how" here and it's a very simplistic ABC. You meditate on, you memorize, you allow it to change your life, and you ask God to guide the process. It's so simple and yet it's so hard. Why is it so hard? Why is it so difficult? I want to call your attention beginning in verse 13 and I want you to see verses 13 and 14 in contrast to 15 and 16. It says in verse 13, "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes. I will

not forget thy word." Did you notice the difference in language there? In verse 13 and 14, it speaks of that which has already been a part of our life, that which has been present in our life, that which is active in our life. And by the way, these are great things. Declaring the judgments of God and rejoicing in who he is, nothing wrong with that. But then look at verse 15 and 16, "I will. I shall meditate in thy precepts."

The thing I'm about to address at this point is the problem that we have. You say, what do you mean the problem? Well, there's actually a name for this. I'm gonna give it its name and then I'm gonna kind of explain what it is. We call it youth camp syndrome. You say, youth camp syndrome? Oh yeah, it's a real simple analysis. There are those, and some of you have walked through this in your life, where in the summertime, at a young adolescent stage of life, you find yourself either on a bus or car or whatever, and you find yourself in a place with hundreds of other people of like age and it is there, when you're pulled out of the routine of life and the struggles of life and the difficulties of life, that God has an amazing opportunity to speak unto you. It happens at kids camp, youth camp, college camp, whatever it may be. There are times where God gets ahold of us and the reason we call it the youth camp syndrome is that when they come back or when you've come back or when I've come back from camp, boy, are we fired up. I mean, we are ready to charge hell with a water pistol. And then three months later, we're back in the old routine. And we call it the youth camp syndrome because every summer we get all excited about what God wants to do in our life and then every Fall it just falls by the wayside. By the way, you know this isn't a youth camp problem, this isn't a kids camp problem, this is an every week problem. You say, what do you mean? This is called Sunday syndrome. Here at Sunday morning, man, we are declaring the truth of God. We are rejoicing in the things of God. And we are, can I say it, we are jacked up for Jesus. And then the alarm goes off Monday morning and here we go, back into the old routines, back into the old way of doing things.

And then next Sunday comes and it's this vicious cycle, the declaration, the rejoicing, that's great but look at verse 15, "I will meditate." In other words, the antidote, the issue, the solution is to keep that cycle from continually happening in our lives, we have got to meditate on the word of God. That is the Bible way of saying we've got to place it in our heart, we've got to memorize it, we've got to breathe it, live it, eat it, drink it, because it's the only way to break the proverbial cycle. But here's our propensity, our propensity is to not only wander, but to do the opposite of what verse 15 and 16 say, to not meditate and to not, quote, delight.

I want to share with you this morning what I find is some very frightening statistical information. By the way, it's real easy when you do what I'm about to do to kind of look outside the walls and say, mm-hmm, yep, that's the world we're living in, but I'm gonna ask you to do yourself a favor and to look inside today and go, mm-hmm, that's probably the world I'm living in. Whether you realize it or not, we have become a culture, we've become a society that's not only technologically focused, we are obsessed with it. And there's a little item out there today known as social media. If you're not a real fan of social media, God bless you, but the world is. It's the way by which we communicate, it's the way by which we get news, we get information, we interact with one another. Did you

know that in the United States of America, the average person, that's you and that's me, spends two and a half hours a day on social media? Now, I know what some of you are thinking. Man, I don't spend that much time, but your granddaughter does. And your grandson does. Did you know for teenagers, the number is over four hours a day? The average American, two and a half hours searching, scrolling, talking, getting mad, whatever social media does to you. But there's another one. Any of y'all ever find yourself, by the way, I'm not asking for a raise in the hands, anybody ever find yourself watching videos on your phone? I mean, whether it's YouTube or another platform, whatever it may be, you know, sometimes it's kind of just putting your brain in neutral, whatever. Do you know the average in America, not social media, but just videos is 30 minutes.

Let me do some simple math for you. The average American spends three wasted hours a day on social media, three hours. I will make you a promise. If you and I went on a social media fast, every one of us would have our chapter memorized by next Sunday. 21 hours! But you know what the problem is and so do I. The problem is we get in a cycle. Our propensity is to go back to our old ways. What does he say here in verse 15? "I will delight. I will meditate." And so the propensity is to just wander and allow our minds to wander and to gravitate toward the things of this world. We must be focused. We must be intentional. And here's the beautiful part about it, what does he end this chapter by saying? "Then I will not forget." Last time I checked, the devil doesn't send you a two minute warning before he tempts you. It's not like you have time to run real quick and grab it. It's got to be hidden in your heart. Last time I checked, those diagnoses and those difficulties of life rarely give you advanced warning. They just show up on the proverbial screen, do they not? Do we have the word of God hidden? Do we have the power of it in our lives or is it just a dusty book on the shelf, the dashboard of our truck, or something that we can Google real quick? God has given us all the power we need if we will just utilize it the way he told us to.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Today as we come to this time of decision, not just in this service but in our lives, we talk about the power of the word of God, we talked about earlier in the message that all of us at some way have gone wayward. You know what the word of God says? Not human philosophy. The word of God says in Romans 10, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That's power. That means that somebody who has strayed from the Lord, somebody who's rebelled against God, somebody who's thumbed their nose at God, can be forgiven and saved simply because the Bible says if you call on him, he will do so. Maybe today is that day, maybe you're that person who's never called on the name of the Lord to save you, you've never confessed your sin and asked Jesus to be your Savior. Today, you can see in your own life the power of God demonstrated. His word says if we call unto him he will save us. So maybe today's that day. Maybe you're that person. Let me encourage you just to do what the Bible says. It's not about reading a script. It's not about repeating the right words in the right order that somebody tells you to do. It's about a heart's cry that whoever calls on the name of the Lord and maybe today your heart's cry with your heads bowed your eyes closed, maybe today your heart's cry would go a little something like this. "God, today I recognize, I believe that your word is it's not just powerful, but it's

true. I have a sin problem. I have gone wayward. I've been places I had no reason to be. I've participated in activities I should have never signed up for. Lord, I've spoken words and had thoughts that are so contrary to you. Your word tells me that the wages, the result of my sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God, today I believe. I believe I've got a sin problem that according to your word can only be solved by Jesus. I believe that he loved me so much that he came on my behalf. He lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, today I believe that when Jesus Christ allowed himself to be nailed to the cross he was bearing the pain and the punishment of my sin, and God, I believe that three days later according to your word when he walked out of that grave he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the struggles and the problems of life but, Lord, I do know according to your word, I have a sin problem that can only be solved by Jesus. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life. over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe today you're that one who for the very first time trusted in Jesus as your Savior. In just a moment, I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing together. And while we're standing in a moment, I just want to invite you wherever you are just to step out and step forward. I'll be here at the front. We'll have others as well. We would love to celebrate what God has and is doing in your life. Or maybe today you say, "Pastor, I'm already saved but I really need to talk to somebody about walking obedience through baptism." We'd love to have that conversation. Or maybe today you're that one or you're that family, you're those many who've said, "You know, this is our church home. How do we make that? How do we solidify that?" We'd love to sit down and talk with you. Or maybe today, even though it's the start of a new year, it's the same old struggles, it's the same old problems, and maybe today you just need somebody to pray with you and to cry with you, maybe today you just say, "You know, there's no real decision to make, but boy, wouldn't it be nice to have somebody just to pray with me or over me regarding this matter." Whatever the decision, we're here for you.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of the service, thank you. Thank you that your word says in 1 Peter 5:7 that we can cast our cares upon you because you care for us. Lord, whether that's the need to be saved, whether that's the need just to grow closer to you or make some formal decision, God, today may we cast our cares because you care for us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.