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The centrality of God's Word to the life of the Christian: Psalm 119:1-8:
November 4

Introduction:

We have all had the experience of seeing a breathtaking and expansive view, perhaps capturing such a view with a panoramic photo on our camera, phone or iPad.

Or we've seen a huge building like the great Pyramid at Pisa in Cairo wondering how on earth it was ever constructed.

Psalm 119 is like this. It's the longest Psalm in Scripture consisting of 176 verses divided into 22 stanzas. It is called an 'alphabetical acrostic' because in the Hebrew language in which it was written, each stanza commences in turn with one of the 22 Hebrew letters and each verse within each stanza commences with that same letter with which the stanza commences. Sadly, we can't see this pattern in our English Bibles.

The whole Psalm is devoted to a consideration of the Word of God. Throughout the Psalm, eight different words are used to describe the Word of God, or Scripture. These are: *law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, ordinances, word and promise.*

The first 8 verses give us an overview of what's contained in the rest of the Psalm and could be entitled *the undivided heart*. Let's note 4 things from these 8 verses:

1. Scripture if given to us by God.

In verse 1, Scripture is described as *the law of the **Lord***, not referring to the Law of Moses but to the whole revelation of God.

In verse two it is referred to as ***his** statutes*.

Verse three refers to ***his** ways*.

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From verse 4, the Psalmist turns to the Lord and addresses Him in prayer: *you have laid down precepts.*

In verse 5 the Psalmist prays that he might be steadfast in *obeying your decrees.*

In verse 6 his prayer is that he would not be put to shame when *I consider all your commands.*

In verse 7 he wants to praise God with an upright heart as *I learn your righteous laws.*

The section ends in verse 8 with a commitment to *obey your decrees.*

This understanding of Scripture as being The Word of God is reinforced throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example:

- The Psalmists who wrote Psalm 1 and 19 write in a similar vein to the Psalmist who wrote Psalm 119.
- Paul writing to Timothy says *All Scripture is God-breathed.* (2 Timothy 3:16)
- Peter describes Paul's writings as Scripture and says that he wrote with *the wisdom that God gave him.* (2 Peter 3:15-16)
- Peter also writes: *for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

2. Scripture is given by God to God's people for a purpose.

Paul writes: *all Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Psalmist says that those who *walk according to the law of the Lord* are blessed. (verse 1) And those who *keep his statutes and*

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*seek him with all their heart are blessed. (verse 2) And they do nothing wrong; they **walk** in his ways. (verse 3)*

There is an emphasis here on acting upon what God says.

Later, James would write: *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:22)*

John, commenting on our response to the Word of God in his letters, says a lot about *walking in the truth and living by the truth.*

The purpose, for which God gave His Word, was that it might be obeyed! The Psalmist says this three times within these eight verses: *You have laid down precepts that are to be fully **obeyed** and Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees and I will obey your decrees. (verses 4, 5 and 8)*

3. Responding to God's Word.

Given that God has spoken and continues to speak through His Word, what should be our response?

- **Read it!** We can't walk according to God's Word and obey it unless we read it! The Psalmist wrote *I **consider** all your commands. (verse 6) Then he wrote I will praise you with an upright heart as I **learn** your righteous ways. (verse 7) He read it!*
If we claim to be Christians, then we should be regularly reading the Bible and taking it seriously!
- **Obey it!** We've already thought about this but it's worth reminding ourselves about the importance of doing what God says in every area of our lives.
- **Praying about it!** The Psalmist writes *blessed are they who seek him (God) with all their hearts. (verse 2) And I will praise you with*

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an upright heart. (verse 7) We need to pray that God would speak to us through the pages of the Bible.

4. What is the state of those who live by God's Word?

They are blessed by God. (verses 1-2) The word *blessed* appears 26 times in the Book of Psalms. It means that a person is *truly happy*. Truly happy *are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to God's Word. Truly happy are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.*

This condition of being *blessed* or truly happy doesn't mean that everything will always be rosy for the Christian. Bad things may happen: illness, death, bankruptcy, loss of job, failed crops etc. But the truly happy person will trust God through such challenges and struggles and God will strengthen them to get through them.

Conclusion:

As we've looked at the opening section of Psalm 119, we've seen 4 things which are very practical about the Psalm's main theme, The Word of God:

1. Scripture is given to us by God.
2. Scripture is given to us by God for a purpose.
3. We've considered how we should respond to God's Word.

And finally,

4. We've thought about the condition of the person who lives by God's Word. They are truly happy.

May God help us to be people of The Book!