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LIVING IN THE WORD

Psalm 119:9-16

Hebrew children were taught the alphabet through word-pictures. Each letter was related to a picture and each picture to a biblical concept. What this meant was that as the children were learning their ABC's, they were learning principles and promises from the Word of God.

Psalm 119 is a textbook on living in the Word of God; every second, every moment, every hour of every day. These principles are beautifully expressed by the writer in vv. 9-16. The writer of the 119th Psalm, by the way, is a captive on the slave-march to Babylon after the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Using the form of an acrostic-- as Jeremiah had in his "Lamentations"-- he begins to work his way through the alphabet. Every morning this young captive wakes up and forces himself to focus on a letter of the alphabet and the symbol for that letter. As he meditated on the symbol throughout the day, he would compose eight verses. Each v. started with the same letter; each line was constructed in the light of that symbol; each lesson confirmed the message that Jeremiah had hammered over and over and over again before Judah's fall to the Chaldeans-- the only thing that can sustain any nation or individual is the Word of God.

The Trail of the Word-- vv. 9-10.

V. 9 begins the beth (b) section of this acrostic poem. The beth pictures a house (Beth-lechem = House of Bread; Beth-El = House of God). By itself, a house represents shelter. But when a family lives together, the house becomes a home. The Word of God is designed to be our home-- the place where we can always find security, support, encouragement, enjoyment, love. Jesus said that if we abide-- if we live-- in His Word, then we are truly His disciples (Jn. 8:31-32; Jn. 15:7).

This young man, whoever he is-- some have suggested as possible authors Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Ezekiel, Ezra-- will never again experience the pleasure of simply being at home with his family. He will never hear the sound of his father and uncles arguing about the Torah, or catch the aroma of his

mother's bread fresh out of the oven. All that's left of his physical home are ashes and memories. But he has a better place to live, a place no enemy can ever destroy. So, on the second day of his meditations, he sets his mind on the beth and the idea of being at home in the Word.

A. He begins by asking the question, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" The Piel stem of *zakah* means- make or to keep clean, clear, and pure. The idea is completely pure, thoroughly pure, spiritually pure. The Piel is the 'intensive active' stem in Hebrew, and so we add the adverb for intensity.

1) The first thing a person did upon entering a house in Biblical times was to wash his feet. In the home of a gracious host, servants-- or even the host himself-- would do the cleansing. It was a way of saying, "Welcome, make yourself comfortable in my home."

2) Footwashing in the NT is a picture of confession and cleansing. Cf. John 13:3-10.

John records at the beginning of the Upper Room Discourse (Jn. 13-17), how Jesus, by washing the feet of the disciples, illustrated vividly and experientially, the principle of confession. In John 13:3-10 he says that Jesus, "...knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded [word for 'wash,' *ni/ptw* (*nip̄to*), means- wash a part of the body]."

These three vv. are probably the greatest illustration, the greatest example, of Jesus' humility we have. Here we see the Lord of Glory laying aside his outer garments, to wrap a towel around His waist and perform the duties of a common slave, a common *doulos*.

a. Those garments which He laid aside speak of the expression of His preincarnate glory.

b. That towel, a symbol of His voluntary status as a bond-slave, represents the humility with which He clothed Himself. One had to be laid aside if the other was to be taken up.

c. While He was kneeling on the floor washing the disciples' feet, He was still the Lord of Glory, although He looked every bit like a bond-slave. The weary, homeless, itinerant, travel-stained preacher of Galilee looked like a man, yet He was eternal God.

d. When He had finished the duties of a bond-slave, for that's whose responsibility this was in the ancient world, He laid aside the towel and took His robes again.

The spiritual importance of this can be seen when we understand that when our Lord had finished His work on Calvary's Cross, He took His robes of glory again-- His insignia of majesty-- and resumed the expression of His Deity, only this time in a glorified resurrection body.

John continues with the fact that when Jesus "...came to Simon Peter," Peter "said to Him, 'Lord, do You wash my feet?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter [through / mentorship of God / HS as / teacher and recaller of divine truth].' [now we see / conflict of attitude in Peter, / conflict between arrogance and humility] Peter said to Him, 'Never shall You wash my feet!'

Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me [meros is used here for / part or / place which is assigned to someone; Jesus is speaking of fellowship, communion, i.e., 'if you don't allow me to cleanse you from sin experientially, that part which God assigned to you, Peter, cannot be accomplished, the place which you have been given, cannot be fulfilled.']. Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.' Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean [How?-- through / washing of regeneration; Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:5, '...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;'] Paul told Titus that when the kindness and love of God for mankind appeared, 'He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in {arrogant, self-} righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,' Titus 3:5]; and you are clean, but not all {of you [He's speaking here of Judas Iscariot].}'"

a. The word John uses for "bathed" in v. 10 is the perf. pass. part. of lou/w (louo).

b. Louo means- bathe the entire body; as opposed to washing only the hands, or the feet, or the face.

c. The perfect tense pictures the once and for all "washing of regeneration" which the HS accomplished at the moment we believed in Christ, and which stands true of us forever after. {Illustrate the principle of regeneration in the perfect tense.}

d. The passive voice indicates that the believer is the recipient of this complete spiritual cleansing. It emphasizes that he cannot earn it, he does not deserve it, and there is nothing he could ever do to accomplish it. Regeneration is a provision of the grace of God, one of the 51 things God does for us at the moment of salvation.

Point of this Passage: Without cleansing, without that spiritual purification which comes through the confession of our sins, we cannot have fellowship with God.

3) If you want to be at home in the Word, you can't simply ignore unconfessed sinful thoughts, words, and actions. We must come before the throne of grace in humility, and acknowledge-- identify-- those things which are hindering our fellowship with the Father and the Son, and are blocking the path of our forward progress in the plan of God.

4) Why? Because when we come unwashed to the open door of the Word, we are saying to Jesus Christ, "I will not avail myself of Your grace, and I do not intend to be at home here." That's why. --Back to Psalm 119.

B. The Psalmist answers his own question about how to keep his life spiritually pure, with the phrase, "By keeping {it} according to Your word."

1) To "keep" means- guard, observe, give heed. The greatest danger we face as believers is the danger of becoming negative to the Word. If we keep a positive, hungry attitude-- a yieldedness to the Word of God and the Spirit of God-- we will stay on the path of the will of God.

2) That doesn't mean that we are experientially perfect, or that we will never sin again. It means that if and when we do sin, we will utilize the confession and cleansing of 1 John 1:9, claim by faith God's forgiveness, and move on.

Principle: The only way to live a life that is consistent with the will of God is to live a life that is consistent with the Word of God.

C. This young man say's to God, "With all my heart I have sought You."

1) To seek God, we have to be often in the Word because that is where he tells us about who He is and what He is like. Every day we face two choices:

a. We can stay on the path, focusing on the Son of God as He has been revealed to us through the Word of God, and refining our way through the principle of obedience. This leads to a life of inner peace, tranquility, and contentment.

b. We can wander off the path, focusing on the world, other people, or ourselves. This leads to a life of misery.

2) Because he wandered so far from the provisions and resources of home, the Prodigal Son ended up fighting with pigs over something to put in his stomach. In contrast to the Prodigal, when we stay at home in the Word, we have access to the unfathomable riches of God.

3) The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Asia Minor, "Blessed {be} the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly {places} in Christ," Ephesians 1:3. The only way we will ever come to know, understand, and appreciate the wealth, resources, and privileges that belong to us in Christ is from a clear and accurate comprehension of the Word of God.

II. The Treasure of the Word-- v. 11.

A. Understand that any truth from the Word of God that you have stored as epignosis in your heart can be developed into a doctrinal rationale to meet a test or crisis in your life. Epignosis is full knowledge, i.e., precise and correct knowledge to which faith has been applied.

B. In his aleph meditations in the first 8 vv. of Psalm 119 the author concentrated on the fact that the Word of God was his wealth. The more we understand and appreciate this truth, the more we will want to lay up the Word in our hearts and treasure it.

C. "Treasured" is from the Hebrew }apfc tsaphan- hide, treasure, store up. Here it means- conceal something with the definite purpose of protection-- to treasure the Word of God on account of its value.

1) How do we "treasure" the physical things we value? By keeping them out of the reach of thieves, insulated against fire and corrosion, and in prime working order.

2) How do we "treasure" the Word? By meditation upon it and application of it, so that we may not sin against the One who gave it to us.

We "treasure" the Word by retreating often to the storeroom of our soul, reviewing and admiring, going over and over again, the promises, principles and truths that we have hidden there. That is exactly what this young man is doing. Outwardly, he is homeless and destitute. Inwardly, he is counting his riches.

4 Things To Learn from Treasuring the Word

1) The child of God should "treasure" His Word above all else; for the Word applied in the power of the Spirit is the key to victory. Experientially we could say, it is in fact, the victory.

2) God has one basis for evaluating our love for Him-- our attitude toward His Word and our application of it to life.

3) If we truly love Him, we will cling to and dedicate ourselves to His Word.

4) If we have no dedication to the written Word, then we have no real love for the Living Word.

D. The verbal phrase "I may ...sin," is the Qal future of)f+fx *chata*, which means- miss the goal of right and duty. The goal he's talking about here is having the treasure of God's Word in his soul.

1) The "sin" is more than the mental, verbal, and overt things that usually come to mind when we think of personal sin. It is the failure to store up the Word when we have the chance, when we have the luxury-- as we do right now!-- of unimpeded opportunity.

2) The Word will strengthen us against sin, and it will deliver us when we do sin. But it cannot do its work when it is hidden in the pages of an unused book. It must be circulating in the soul's stream of consciousness.

3) The Word of God is eternal treasure; the viewpoint of the Cosmic System is trash. Our souls will be filled with one or the other. We decide, all of us-- children, adults, young and old alike-- a thousand times a day, which one it will be.

III. The Teaching of the Word-- v. 12.

A. As the captive reaches out for companionship, he turns to the One who is the Source of all grace and blessing, and utters two of the most important words in the Bible, two words that never fail to please God, that never fail to cause the Lord to rejoice-- "teach me."

B. What is he saying here? What spiritual lesson can we learn from the humility that reaches out for an understanding of the will and Word of God?

The lesson is that companionship and communion with Jesus Christ both begin with teachability, the attitude that says to God:

"I may not understand what is happening to me, but I am grateful that You allowed me to be in this situation. There is something here for me to learn. Father, teach me! Right here, right now, right where I am."

IV. The Telling of the Word-- vv. 13-14.

A. Here we see the captive sharing the treasure of the Word; offering to others around him-- in the same desperate conditions, in the same desperate circumstances-- the closeness and depth of relationship with the Lord that he has found.

Though these captives have neither homes nor dinner tables around which to gather, they can still break bread together. They can share the spiritual food of

the Word and find both fellowship with the Lord and companionship with one another.

B. Notice the progression of v. 14. Companionship leads to communication, and communication leads to celebration.

1) The result of telling others about the Living Word-- Jesus Christ-- and the written Word is joy. This is God's design for the Spiritual Life. This is the way it is supposed to be; not darkness, and gloom and self-pity, but fellowship, communication and true spiritual joy.

2) If you want to see joy in action, joy as the hallmark of spirituality and the birthright of the believer in Jesus Christ, study Paul's letter to the Philippians! The command for every last believer in the Body of Christ to live a lifestyle of spiritual joy, a lifestyle of celebrating the Eternal Victory of the Lord Jesus Christ on a moment by moment, day by day basis, is repeated on four separate occasions in this one letter-- in Philippians 2:18; Philippians 3:1; and twice in Philippians 4:4.

a. The theme of joy in the grace of God and in what that grace has accomplished on your behalf comes up over and over and over again. And it's a theme that desperately needs to be repeated in this day and age, from whatever churches across this nation are teaching the Word of God with clarity, accuracy and precision.

b. Believers, for the most part, are a miserable and unhappy people; and that's a tragedy, cause it doesn't have to be that way. They reside in this 'realm of misery' because they have forsaken the one goal of pursuing the plan of God and conformity to the Person of Jesus Christ. Separate and apart from building your life, and organizing your scale of values, around this sole priority, the one thing you crave and hunger for above all others-- happiness-- will be unattainable, forever just beyond your reach!

V. The Training In The Word-- vv. 15-16.

A. "Meditate," in v. 15, is from the root verb xayi& siyach- meditate, contemplate, go over and over a matter in one's mind. It is used here of the believer's silent reflection on the Word of God. Let me give you the principle that comes out of this-- Biblical meditation involves reflecting on and digesting the Word of God.

B. To "regard" means- look intently at someone or something, look with great pleasure and care. The captive meditates on the Word and finds in it an understanding of God's plan and purpose for his life. This leads him to a deep, peaceful sense of intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. In v. 16 we find sha'a, a Hebrew word which means- take delight in; caress, touch with great intimacy. Sha'a is an expression of deep affection. Imagine a word like this being used for the believer's rightful attitude toward the Word of God.

D. The captive closes this section with a resolute mindset that needs to be resounded in the minds and attitudes of believers today. He say's, "I will never forget Your Word."

3 Summary Principles

1. At one time or another you will need every doctrine you have ever learned.
2. If ever you lack inner resources as a spiritual warrior, then you have failed to arm yourself in advance.
3. God provides the opportunity to listen and learn; the fault of failing in this respect is our own, and no one else's. As Jesus told His disciples in the Olivet Discourse, "take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance," Mark 13:23.

In Conclusion

Yieldedness to the Word of God, that unconditional desire for truth that is absolute, opens to the most rewarding activity of the Spiritual Life-- to explore the thinking of God, and to employ His eternal wisdom as your constant guide, your ever present counsel. This one critical endeavor gives life its meaning, purpose and definition. And if you doubt that, just ask me!

The Word of God, which He designed to pierce the very depths of our souls and shine its brilliant light on the darkness it finds there, transforming us into mirror images of our Lord, is no longer the means to an end, but instead becomes the end itself, the path upon which every believer who desires to be a winner must tread.