

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (26-11-2002 Framsdén Baptist Church)

Psalm 119:105 (part i)
Additional reading: Psalm 119:1-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Your Word – a Lamp and a Light

Introduction

With 176 verses, Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm. It is an acrostic psalm, where the psalmist has gone systematically through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, writing eight sentences beginning with each letter. These eight sentences are now grouped as eight verses in our English Bibles.

This Psalm is a hymn of praise to God who has made Himself known, revealed Himself, and spoken to us by His Word. It uses eight different Hebrew words to tell us how God has spoken to us and made Himself known.

“Word” – a very general word, meaning all truth God has promised and taught.
“Law” – all teaching He has given about Himself and what He wants from us.
“Testimonies” (“statutes” in NIV) – God’s covenant terms for His people to observe.
“Precepts” – detailed rules for life.
“Statutes” (“decrees” in NIV) – laws of binding force, that have been engraved.
“Commandments” – the personal will of God, by His own authority.
“Ordinances” or “Judgements” (“laws” in NIV) – decisions of the all wise judge about man’s rights and duties.
“Word” (different Hebrew) – in the sense of a promise.

These eight words describe the many sidedness of God’s revelation. It is man’s duty to love, walk, keep, observe, delight in, respect and learn these things. They set us free from sin’s dominion, enlarge our understanding of God, give us light for our path, and give us spiritual life as we know God’s vitalising touch reviving and restoring us. All this is especially important because the psalmist was under attack, isolated, and distressed by all he has to see and hear.

The psalmist was only writing about the parts of the Old Testament that were written up at his time. But we can refer these words to the whole of Scripture, now that the canon of the Old and New Testaments are complete. We have the complete Word of God in our hands, all 66 books.

Going to consider this complete Word of God in four sermons, taking Psalm 119:105 as our focus. Two sessions on the importance of the Word of God, to show us how significant it is to our lives and what it could do for people if they would read it, believe it and obey it. Then two more sessions on how we should interpret the Bible and use it to get the maximum benefit.

A book of unique origin

Here is the world’s best-seller, the world’s most wonderful book, the most widely-read, and of greatest influence. To some, the best loved, to others, the most hated, and

the least understood. Queen Victoria described the Bible as the secret of God's greatness. Abraham Lincoln said, "I believe the Bible is the best book God has ever given to man." Napoleon said, "The Bible is no more a book but a living creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it." Charles Dickens said, "The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or will be known in the world". At the Coronation of the present English monarch, the words are spoken, "We present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom. This is royal law. These are the lively oracles of God."

So what are the origins of this great book? The Bible's claims for itself – **All Scripture is God-breathed** (2 Timothy 3:16), i.e. it is given by the inspiration of God. **Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit** (1 Peter 1:21). If these words were written originally with reference to the preliminary Old Testament, how much more are they true of the fulfilment in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, we find the words "And God said.." 3500 times. Why accept the Old Testament? Because Jesus did. He quoted from it, "It is written..." and that was final with Him, **The Scripture cannot be broken** (John 10:35), and He died with it on His lips. At the same time, He made provision for the writing of the New Testament. When He promised the Holy Spirit would come, He said **He will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you** (John 14:26). **He will guide you into all truth... He will tell you what is yet to come** (John 16:13).

So the Bible clearly has a divine author. Yet it is also a human book with human authors – God did not treat the men like typewriters or computers. He used different men, at different times in history, dealing with different issues, writing in different styles. They were fully conscious and in control of their faculties. Hence we see Mark's style is very different from Matthew's, and Paul's style is not the same as John's. We see different theological emphases between the writers, e.g. Amos writes about the justice of God, Hosea about the love of God, and Isaiah about the holiness of God. Sometimes the same word is used by different men but with different emphases, e.g. the use of the word "faith" in the writings of Paul, James, and the writer to the Hebrews. Men referred back to earlier books, or carefully investigated and researched their own material (Luke 1:3). They produced different kinds of literature – histories, psalms, proverbs, letters, laws, poems, and prophecies.

Sometimes they used picture or figurative language, hence we need to make sure we interpret the Bible in the sense the author intended, not necessarily literally, e.g. the sun portrayed figuratively as a bridegroom or athlete (Psalm 19:5), the valleys shouting for joy (Psalm 65:13), the mountains skipping like rams (Psalm 114:6), God walking (Genesis 3:8), God coming down (Genesis 11:5), Jesus offering living water (John 4:10)

We also have to remember that there are erroneous statements in the Bible, which are not to be believed and obeyed, such as the words of Satan, and Job's comforters. We can learn from them, but we are not meant to obey them. Remember too that simple words and terms have deliberately been used which ordinary people in every generation can understand. We should not expect a scientific account about the origin of the world and universe which only specialists could understand, and which, in any case, would be out of date in ten years time.

So it is very much a human book, written by men, to be understood by men in a culture and time different from ours. Yet at the same time divinely inspired, and that inspiration extended to the very words they used, i.e. verbal inspiration. The writers were prepared and taught by God. Their writing was superintended by the Holy Spirit. The writers expressed the mind and the will of God. They wrote with insight, accuracy and authority about divine things. Their words are an utterly trust-worthy revelation for us about God and His purposes. Fully human. Fully divine. Every word by a human author and by a divine author. Truly the Word of God as well as the word of men. Reliable and infallible.

When J.B. Phillips was working on his translation of the Bible, he described it as being “like rewiring a house with the mains left on” – he felt the enormous power of it. It was like no other writing.

The inspiration of God extends only to the original Hebrew and Greek writings, not to any English version. This worries people because we do not possess the original writings – they are not in a museum somewhere. What we do have are manuscripts which have been copied at different times, and which are not always in agreement (e.g. Psalm 145:13b, Mark 16:9-20 – passages that are not in all manuscripts).

There is need for a separate discussion on this issue, but briefly, there are more manuscripts of the New Testament, and they are nearer to the original writings than any other ancient writings. F.F. Bruce says that it is the unanimous verdict of textual scholars that the text of the Bible has been excellently preserved. No point of doctrine is dependent on the small number of cases where the original reading is in doubt. Textual scholars see God’s singular care and providence in the substantial purity of the Bible text as it has come down to us. Sir Fredrick Kenyon (archaeologist, palaeographer, Bible and classical scholar) wrote, “By the providence of God, the Bible has come down to us in such substantial purity that we have in our hands the veritable Word of God.”

There are very few cases now where we are unsure what the original words were. Less than one word in a thousand is in doubt. No basic doctrine, no ethical principal, no foundation fact is in doubt because of differences among manuscripts. Textual criticism is concerned only with a relatively small portion of text.

Marks of inspiration

Is there evidence of one mind and divine power behind the Bible? Indeed, there is unity and harmony of contents. Although written in different centuries by different authors (40 authors, over 1500 years), throughout is the same story of God and His saving purposes for men.

There is the amazing fulfilment of prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah. How often New Testament writers quote Old Testament prophecy. “This was done that it might be fulfilled.....”, particularly in Matthew’s Gospel.

Archaeological digs have supported Bible statements to refute sceptics. No archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a Bible reference or statement. The

accuracy of Acts was questioned until Sir William Mitchell Ramsey's discoveries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Frederick the Great asked his chaplain for proof of the inspiration of the Bible, to which the chaplain replied, "The Jews, your majesty".

There is also the moral power of the Bible to transform men's lives and societies, which we shall consider more in the next session. The Bible's suitability to meet spiritual needs of all men of every age and every country. It is the only book in existence which is never out of place or out of date. There is undoubted wisdom and majesty in its style.

But most convincing of all is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit to the believer's heart that this is the Word of God. All the other aspects mentioned hitherto strengthen faith, but only the Holy Spirit brings absolute certainty.

Purpose of the Bible

The Bible is not a complete encyclopaedia. It is not a textbook of ancient history, or a scientific textbook. There is even much about the main characters that we do not know. Jesus lived 33 years, and His ministry was 3 years long, but we only have information about 40 days. All of Jesus' recorded teaching could have been delivered in about 6 hours. The sermons recorded in Acts are only summaries, taking a few minutes to read. Someone calculated the entire Bible could be read cover to cover at pulpit rate in 78 hours. We do not have all we want, but we do have all we need.

So what is the purpose of Scripture? **All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness** (2 Timothy 3:16). It is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and practice – what we are to believe and how we are to live. Is there a God? What is He like? Can I know Him? Why am I here? Sin and salvation? Heaven and hell? How should I live? What resources are available to me? In a world of shifting sands, we have "the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture" (W.G.Gladstone). It gives us security and sense of direction.

Sufficiency of Scripture

So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). The Holy Spirit guided the Apostles into *all* truth (John 16:13). **Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints** (Jude 3). There is no truth we should believe and duty we should perform about which the Bible does not give us adequate information to enable us to believe and obey. The Bible lacks nothing.

It is not enough to say that the Scriptures are necessary, which is as far as Roman Catholicism and Mormonism can state. But we need to go a step further and say that the Scriptures are sufficient. "If God teaches it, it is enough. If it is not in the Word, then away with it. But if it is in the Word, agreeable or disagreeable, I believe it." (C.H.Spurgeon). "You are shut up to two things. Either you make your own God and religion for yourself, and stand and fall by it eternally. Or you take the religion of Jesus, as revealed to you in His Word. Choose now and forever. God helping me, I will stand or fall by the Lord Jesus Christ. I will put my trust in His truth and teaching

as I find it in the written Word of God, and doing that, as sure as the Lord Jesus Christ is the Truth, I must be forgiven and saved” (Brownlow North).