

As Faith Grows
so comes the
Blessing of Obedience



(OHP) If you've got your Bibles to now would be a good time to turn them to **Psalm 119** and as you do that, let me begin by asking us a few questions:

- **Who wants to be blessed? Who'd like to be blessed?**
 - **Who wants to live life to the full?**
- **Who wants to abide in God's love and be full of joy?**

I guess those are questions we could put our hands up to and say yes, I might have asked you to do that, put your hands up; yes: **"I want to be blessed and full of joy and know life to the full."**

Here's another question. **Who wants to obey?! Yes? But through slightly more gritted teeth perhaps?**

The truth of what we're going to look at next few weeks...is that 'blessing' and 'obedience' go hand in hand.

The way to be blessed by God is to journey obediently with him.

Not just through gritted teeth, but passionately committed and longing and seeking to stay in step with him.

We are going to need some help to see that. So, let's ask for that help from the one who loves to give help to those who ask it of him.

**Let's pray now: Heavenly Father,
You have commanded in your word that your law be kept diligently.
And so, we ask for two things tonight Lord: help us to see the blessing of obedience and give us a passion to obey. We ask this in your name. Amen!**

Well this is the first in a new mini-series... We will then 'God willing' look at either **Spiritual blessings/ Giftings**...and then pick up where we left off with the **Covenant series**...*That might then lead us into Christmas and Advent...?*

So for the next four weeks we're going to be looking at the first **40 verses of Psalm 119** – it's the longest Psalm in the Bible – there's 176

verses in it. **Psalm 119** holds high the words and wisdom of God and convinces us to treasure it more than anything else in life.

Why is it so long? Well, it's a work of art. It's a wonderful work of art.

The Hebrew alphabet has **22 letters** in it and each letter of that Hebrew alphabet is given a section in this Psalm.

So, the first 8 verses all begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the next 8 the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet and so on. We lose some of that in our English translations.

What we don't lose, is the focus of this Psalm.

Nearly every verse in it contains a word that is used to refer to the importance or value of God's word (of scripture, of the Bible).

So, if you've got the Psalm open, just allow your eyes to land randomly on any one of the verses and what you'll see is that it contains a word that refers to the word of God.

So that might be the word law or precept or command or testimony or statute or decree or promise or the word 'word' itself.

It's in there in pretty much every verse in **Psalm 119**.
The focus of pretty much the central chapter in almost the centre of our Bibles is on the importance God's word itself.

Whoever wrote it, and we don't know who that is for sure, but whoever wrote it was someone who longed to apply his life to the whole counsel of God's word and as we shall see he clearly believed there was no better way to 'do life' so to speak than by obeying what God says.

So just two headings this morning and the first is this:

(OHP) 1. THE ONLY WAY OF BLESSING...through obedience! (Psalm 119.1-4)

Psalm 119 begins with a great invitation - an invitation to be blessed!

Reading **Psalm 119.1-2**:

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!

Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart...

I don't know how you feel when you read these verses, but it's hard not to be both excited but slightly discouraged by them isn't it?

“*Blessed are....*” That’s a common refrain of Scripture we’ll be familiar with.

We might think of Jesus’s famous sermon on the mount: *Blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers etc!* (**Matthew 5**).

We might think of Paul who quotes the Psalms in **Romans 4.7**: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds [*sins*] are forgiven.

We might even think of **Psalm 1.1**: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

Who doesn’t want blessing?

Who isn’t attracted by the prospect of being blessed?

And yet, as well as this positive angle in these first couple of verses, are we not also a little disheartened?

Blessed are those...whose way is blameless...that’s not me Lord!

I’m not perfect. I’m not blameless.

Blessed are those...who walk in the law of the Lord!...yeah, not so much this week Lord actually. Not so much this week!

Blessed are those...who keep his testimonies...well some of them, but not all of them.

Blessed are those... who seek him with their whole heart...oh man – whole heart? I mean yes some of it, part of my heart. But all of my heart, Really?

How on earth can the Psalmist sing this?

How can he hold this perfection up as a way to be blessed?

We’ll never qualify if that’s the case, will we?

Well, not so fast!

Because first thing to say is that blameless here cannot mean perfection, cannot mean perfect.

*If you take a look at **Psalm 119.67** for example or look at the last verse of the chapter **Psalm 119.176**, you’ll see that whoever wrote this Psalm acknowledges he has gone astray and that he goes astray, so he’s not perfect.*

Furthermore, Job is described in the Bible as being blameless.

He wasn’t perfect, he wasn’t sinless.

John the Baptist's parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, they're described as being blameless and again they weren't without sin or perfect either.

No. Rather, if you take the blameless of verse 1 and add it to the whole-heartedness of verse 2 what we see is that to be blameless is to have united heart, a unified heart, one that isn't pulling in different directions.

In other words, to be blameless is to have integrity; to be the same on the outside as you are on the inside – to not be two faced!
And in this sense, to be blameless is more about a direction of travel than it is about perfection!

That's is why the Psalmist can write *whose way is blameless*. He's talking about a direction of travel marked by integrity.

I don't know if you heard about the minister who preached about honesty one Sunday? *The next morning he took the bus to work, and paying for his fare, he got his change In return and realised that he'd been given too much change. And he began to rationalise with God what to do with this, how he could use this spare money and how he could use this wisely but it wasn't sitting well with him and he just couldn't justify it so before he got off the bus he went up to the driver and said "look, you've made a mistake. You've given me too much change. "And he proceeded to try and give the driver back some of the extra money but the driver turn around to him and he said: "There was no mistake. I was at you church yesterday and I heard you preach on honesty, and I decided to put you to the test this morning!"*

Blessed are those who's way is marked by integrity.

And that integrity is seen in what we actually do.

Just like the minister in that story.

It's not enough just to believe the right doctrine or preach the right stuff or *think* we should act in a certain way.

It needs to translate into actual action not just thought.

(OHP) That's why the psalmist describes the way of blessing as:

- a walk (**Psalm 119.1 & Psalm 119.3**)
- as something to be kept (**Psalm 119.2 & Psalm 119.4**)
 - as something to be sought (**Psalm 119.2**)
 - as something to actually do (**Psalm 119.3**).

And friends, there is a massive challenge for us here, because the Psalmist is saying that whether or not a man or woman is blessed depends more on *what they do* than on *who they are*!

Now I would love to have been in with you now and just hear that sharp intake of breath as you say *“What did Martyn just say? Did he really say that? Did he really mean that what we do is more important than who we are?!”*

Well no, but then gain yes.

It's certainly true that as Christians we are justified by faith alone and not by works. **Amen!**

It's also gloriously true that our debt has been paid on the cross by Jesus blood and his substitutionary death in our place is a once for all sacrifice. **Hallelujah** for that.

We are children of God, we are adopted in his family, we are given this status. We are forgiven. We are restored. We're even seen by God as blameless.

But is it enough to then just rest in that status?

There is still a life of faith to be lived. We need to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (to use New Testament language).

And in that sense, there is still a journey to go on to reach our destination. *And the only way of blessing on that journey, the only way of enjoying life to the full, the only way to be full of joy is by obedience to God's word. Blessed are those who obey God.*

Having set out objective truth (you could call it doctrine if you like) in these first few verses, the Psalmist then moves to an intensely passionate prayer directed to God in response.

It's a passionate prayer that lasts from **Psalm 119.4-5** all the way to the end of the chapter, but for now we're just going to concentrate on **Psalm 119.4-8**. And in **Psalm 119.4-8** we see the Psalmist model a passionate longing for holiness.

This is my second heading:

(OHP) 2. A PASSION FOR HOLINESS...*through obedience!* (Psalm 119.5-8)

Some of you will never even have heard of him. Christian artist Steve Camp. He's a pastor now in America, but he used to release some really great and challenging music. One of them was a track called "*Stranger to Holiness*" which to this day resonates within my heart.

And In it he sings these lyrics:

"And it pounds like thunder within my breast

All the anger of my humanness

And though I call you "Lord" I must confess

I'm a stranger to your holiness

I don't want to be a stranger to your holiness"

It's a deep prayer, a cry of longing to know the living God intimately and not be a stranger to his holiness.

It's an attitude straight out of this Psalm.

(OHP) Take a look at **Psalm 119.5-8**:

Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!

Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart, [that just means one without hypocrisy, a hear of integrity] when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

Can you hear the urgent passion of this prayer?

Don't put me to shame! Don't utterly [completely] forsake me!

The psalmist doesn't want to be a stranger to God's holiness, he wants to know it inside out and be found close to God.

Is this a longing that you can relate to?

Do you have the same desire to keep God's word, to fix on it, to learn it, to know it, to be consumed by it?

Man, I've been asking that question of myself over these last few days as I've reflected on this passage.

A love for God and a love for his word go hand in hand.

What good is it for me to say that I love God and not be able then to quote any of his word?

If I were to say I love Shakespeare and then not be able say why or tell you some of his work that has affected me, you'd soon figure me out to be a fake. (which incidentally I would be if I said I love Shakespeare because I don't!) but you get my point?

We shouldn't say we love God if the only time we open his word is on a Sunday morning and then we don't pay any attention to it for throughout the rest of the week.

That's not loving God.

That's not the passionate longing for holiness that the psalmist is describing in these verses!

The 19th century evangelist D.L. Moody knew what would put him to shame. He knew what would cause him to be utterly forsaken. I can say that because I found out this this week fascinatingly what he'd written on the flyleaf of his Bible:

"Either this book will keep me from sin, or sin will keep me from this book".

Isn't that great? That's a comment, a wisdom, that comes straight out of Psalm 119.

"Either this book will keep me from sin, or sin will keep me from this book."

And yes, wonderfully God's reveals that the way to be reconciled back into relationship with Him is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But we mustn't cheapen that grace by cherry picking which parts of God's word to obey and which parts we can just give lip service to and ignore because they might be just that little bit too difficult.

To obey. **Psalm 119** does not leave that option open to us! In **Psalm 119.6** the Psalmist's eyes are fixed on all of God's commandments. And because he knows that an obedient walk with the Lord is a true blessing, he longs for it.

So how is this passion for holiness, how is this longing to be in obedient relationship even possible? *Well, that's a little bit of a trailer for next week.*

Tune in again then to find out more. For now, though, let tell you a story, by way of conclusion.

It's story that is told by way of a little boy who is pedalling furiously on his tricycle outside of his home and he's going up and down the pavement outside of his home. A policeman notices this little boy pedalling furiously up and down the pavement and he stops him, and he asks him what he's doing. And the boy said that he was running away from home. To which the policeman said, "well why are you only going up and down

the road then?" To which the boy responded: "Because my Mum told me that I'm not allowed to cross the street."

The lesson? Obedience will keep you close to those you love.

And if we love God, obedience to him through his word will keep us close to him.

We will then be in the presence of God himself, and nothing is more of a blessing than that!

Let's pray

Oh, that our ways may be steadfast in keeping your word O Lord! Father please would you forgive our mediocrity and half-heartedness

And Father please would you increase our passion for holiness and our longing to obey your word.

We pray this in Jesus Name.

Amen

Additional Prayers at the end:

I pray today that you see yourself as God sees you.

I pray that you love yourself as God loves you.

I pray that you forgive yourself as God forgives you.

I pray that you know yourself as God knows you.

If you see, love, forgive, and know yourself, you will be able to move forward with God knowing that you can, and you will make it in Jesus name ... Amen.

AS WITH EVERY new day. You have choices to make. You can choose to bring correction to anything that you may have said, or did yesterday that was not in line with God's Word or will for your life.

Choose to repent and move forward with God. Don't be held in bondage by yesterday's mistakes. As you choose to repent and move forward with God, do it with expectation. Expect God to open up new doors of knowledge, understanding, revelation, and manifestation in and over your life. Expect to see God move for you, in you, and through you like never before

I pray today that God's love, His peace, His power, and His presence overtake you.

I pray that His strength empowers you even though you feel weak in yourself. I pray that You arise and that You shine in the light and the glory of the Lord. I pray that you begin to walk in His supernatural blessings and that your life will be a witness and your voice will speak forth the testimony of what you've been through and how God delivered you in Jesus name ... Amen.