



Rev. Mark Willig

The Great Psalm



Psalm 119



Translated as an Alphabet Poem



Followed by

Meditations & Prayers
On Discipleship

with

Christ at the Center

By

Rev. Mark Willig

Pastor of Friends in Christ Lutheran Church, Morris, Illinois

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Introduction:

Come, let's walk together through an amazing Psalm. Let us walk through the ways and testimonies of the word of God.

1. Psalm 119 is the longest in the Bible. It has 8 verses for every letter in the Hebrew alphabet (22 of them) so it has 176 verses.

It is an alphabet poem where each verse begins with a designated letter.

As it moves from part to part it takes us on a journey of discipleship; what it means to walk with God through this life – through the blessings and the testing.

2. And the person right in the middle of the psalm is Jesus, the teacher, the Savior, and the Good Shepherd. He does the walk of faith and says, "follow Me." The blessings and testing, the joys and sorrows are all shared by Him.

3. Throughout Psalm 119 each verse (with only one exception) has a word that has to do with God's Word. "Commandment", "Statute", "Pledge" and "Testimony" are just some of them. They are underlined and become part of the rhythm of the poem. They are explained in the course of the devotions.

One special word included is "Torah," translated as Law, but marked with a cross. Throughout the Psalm "Law" is the translation for Torah, the revealed word, will and acts of God in the first 5 books of the Bible. The meaning is not the same as we think of in the word "law." There are numerous associations and connections to all parts of our faith. In fact, there is a constant pattern in Psalm 119 where the word Torah finally points to Jesus and the cross. For that reason, I have printed it not marked with an asterisk * but with a cross † "law†".

4. Here is a more complete list of the words underlined:

Commands	Pledge
Commandment(s)	Precepts
Decrees	Promise
Faithfulness	Statutes
Judgment(s)	Testimonies
Just Decrees	Torah (usually translated as Law)
Law†	Ways
Ordinance(s)	Word(s)

Dedication

To Paula: 45 years.

You have been well matched to me. Better than I had any right to expect. Companion in so many things. Understanding things others didn't. (You even went along with when we put a fellow pastor's parsonage up for sale, making the sign for in front that said, "For Sale by Occupant" and knowing why we don't stick around for the pictures like the other guys did.)

When this project was being started, you understood the possibilities. You tolerated my ignoring everybody else to read a dictionary (eye rolls). You shared the joy of the picturesque language. And even tolerated the endless sorting through variant wordings. There have been times of discouragement, and you have been my encourager. You shared my excitement (though not as extreme) when the translation was finished. And you have served to record, type out, edit and suggest as each meditation and prayer was completed. You took hold of compiling the listing of the devotions words and joined with me in compiling a list of other voices to ask to be a part.

When the stoke happened, you became my caregiver. 24 hours a day and many of those nights, long and troubled. You advocated for me. Worked with doctors, nurses and CNAs and insisted I would never be put in some cheap facility. When the discouragement became overwhelming, you listened and encouraged over and over again. I am in debt to you for my recovery, as far as it has gotten. You have patiently read and reread sections so that I can edit them. Now as we are nearing completion, you have begun to search out ways of publishing. You prepare foods that I thought I would never, ever be able to eat again (butterscotch milkshake?), and you have not neglected affection.

Thank you, my wife, my sweetheart, and my young wide eyed coed.

Mark

To the Reader

“Make a new translation of Psalm 119? Why?” Good question. I suspect a lot of other people have that same question. Peter, when you asked that question it started me thinking. It sounds crazy at first, but after about five letters it became a work of love and a passion. It had become neglected when read publicly, by me too. It was read without emotion, read with a flat affect, and without the passion in it. But it is deeply passionate, dealing with the joys and sorrows, turmoil, hopes and longing of discipleship. An alphabet poem stretches out and gives the full measure of a thing, so the psalmist has tremendous emotional range. In translating, I dealt with the question of word meanings. They include basic definitions, one basic idea which is as deep as most translations get. But, in addition, there are connotations, associations in both original and translated languages, and associations with the whole world view of the language. That makes the thing a whole lot trickier. For example, the words “freedom” and “liberty” on the surface look like the same thing, but “liberty” has the connotation of not being entangled by obligations and restrictions. Freedom looks like it has the same thing, but then there is the association of the the song “Freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose . . . “ In this song, freedom has a connotation of care nothing for tomorrow, life without purpose. (Bobby McGee by Janis Joplin) So actually, freedom and liberty are very, very different words.

When you do that with the eight verses of each section you get a huge number of possible translations, varying in nuance. Which ones hang together throughout the sections? Which ones connect to the section before or after to give a flow? Which ones express a meaning not carried by another part of the psalm? Which ones focus on a deeper question? (balance, continuity, and context) There are words I worked on translating for months. And all of that has very much deepened my appreciation of the psalmist and the genius of the psalm.

When it came time to write meditations I found that all of the hours spent on meaning, context, association, balance and continuity, came back to add depth and breadth to the work. The meditation did not start from scratch. That work on translation also came back when writing meditations and prayers on the significant words. I hope that this work will help to rekindle an interest in this amazing, astounding psalm, a truly passionate and deeply devotional work of discipleship.

The psalms are the prayerbook of Jesus and each verse, section and significant word has multiple foci. It is not only about the disciple of Jesus, it is about Jesus as the disciple of His Father. Hopes and dreams, blessings and disappointment, self-examination, failure and renewal, betrayal and rescue, vanity and fulfillment are all there and they revolve around God’s word and the cross: “Like a wineskin in smoke”; “Smelter tested”; “Seek Your sheep!” and more. This is why the title is “The Great Psalm.” This psalm is absolutely full of treasures. It does pull you in.

Lord, as You have blessed me, bless all those who take up a study of Your psalm, that Your Word may spread and enrich our walk following You. Amen

Psalm 119

Translated as an alphabet poem:
in consultation with the Knox Translation,
the ESV translation,
Brown, Driver Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, and
Funk & Wagnall's English Dictionary.

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א – ALEPH

- ¹ Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law[†] of the LORD.
- ² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
who seek Him with their whole heart.
- ³ Also they do no wickedness,
but walk in His ways.
- ⁴ Appointed have You, Your precepts
to be kept diligently.
- ⁵ Ah, that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping Your statutes!
- ⁶ As a result I would not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all Your commandments.
- ⁷ Acclaim You with an upright heart, I will
as I learn Your righteous ordinances.
- ⁸ Attend to Your statutes I will;
do not forsake me beyond enduring!

ב – BETH

- ⁹ By what means can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to Your word.
- ¹⁰ Bending all my heart I seek You;
let me not wander from Your commandments!
- ¹¹ Buried deep in my heart I hold Your promise,
that I might not sin against You.
- ¹² Blessèd are You, O LORD;
teach me Your statutes!
- ¹³ By my lips I declare
all the just decrees of Your mouth.
- ¹⁴ Blissful, I exult in the way of Your testimonies
as over all riches.
- ¹⁵ Bound to Your precepts I meditate
and I fix my eyes on Your ways.
- ¹⁶ Boundlessly I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

λ – GIMMEL

- 17 Charitably deal with Your servant,
that I may live and observe Your word.
- 18 Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your law.[†] (Commandment)
- 19 Cast off; I am a sojourner on the earth;
hide not Your commandments from me!
- 20 Consumed is my soul with longing
all the time for Your ordinances.
- 21 Cursed, insolent ones You rebuke;
who wander from Your commandments.
- 22 Contempt and scorn take away from me,
for Your testimonies I have kept.
- 23 Crowned princes even, conspiring against me,
still Your servant will meditate on Your statutes.
- 24 Cherished indeed are Your testimonies to me;
they are my counselors.

T – DALETH

- 25 Dejected, my soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to Your word!
- 26 Disclosing my ways I spoke; and You answered me;
teach me Your statutes!
- 27 Discipleship in Your precepts, make me to understand;
and I will meditate on Your wondrous works.
- 28 Dissolving for sorrow is my soul;
strengthen me according to Your word!
- 29 Deceitful ways put far from me
and graciously teach me Your law![†]
- 30 Discipleship of faithfulness I have chosen;
Your ordinances I set before me.
- 31 Devotedly I cling to Your testimonies, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame!
- 32 Discipleship to Your commandments I will pursue,
when You enlarge my heart!

ן – HE

- ³³ Explain to me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
- ³⁴ Educate me, that I may keep Your law[†]
and observe it with my whole heart.
- ³⁵ Enlighten me in the path of Your commandments,
for in it I delight.
- ³⁶ Endear my heart to Your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain.
- ³⁷ Enjoin my eyes from looking at vain things;
and give me life in Your ways.
- ³⁸ Establish for Your servant Your promise,
which is for those who fear You.
- ³⁹ Eliminate my reproach which I dread,
for Your ordinances are gracious.
- ⁴⁰ Earnestly, I long for Your precepts;
in Your righteousness give me life!

י – WAW

- ⁴¹ For me also, O LORD, let Your covenant mercies be shown,
Your salvation according to Your promise;
- ⁴² fittingly, then, I shall answer those who taunt me,
for I trust in Your word.
- ⁴³ Forsake not my mouth, taking away the word of truth,
for I hope in Your ordinances.
- ⁴⁴ Faithfully, then, I will keep Your law[†]
forever and ever.
- ⁴⁵ Forth, then, shall I walk in liberty,
for I have sought Your precepts.
- ⁴⁶ Freely I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings
and shall not be put to shame,
- ⁴⁷ finding my delight in your commandments,
which I love.
- ⁴⁸ For I also lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on Your statutes.

T – ZAYIN

- ⁴⁹ Guarantee to Your servant Your word,
in which You have made me hope.
- ⁵⁰ Ground of comfort in my affliction is this,
that Your promise gives me life.
- ⁵¹ Godless men utterly deride me,
but from Your law[†] I will not turn away.
- ⁵² Going over Your ordinances from of old,
I take comfort, O LORD.
- ⁵³ Galling indignation seizes me because of the wicked,
who forsake Your law.[†]
- ⁵⁴ Glad songs for me Your statutes have been
in the house of my sojourning.
- ⁵⁵ Grasping Your name in the night, O LORD, I remember
and keep Your law.[†]
- ⁵⁶ Given to me has this been;
that I have observed Your precepts.

N – HETH

- ⁵⁷ Hence therefore, O LORD my portion,
I bind myself to keep Your words.
- ⁵⁸ How I entreat Your favor with all my heart!
Be gracious to me according to Your promise.
- ⁵⁹ Heeding my way,
I turn my feet to Your testimonies.
- ⁶⁰ Hastening I do not delay
to keep Your commandments.
- ⁶¹ However the cords of the wicked may entangle me,
I will not forget Your law.[†]
- ⁶² Harkening at midnight I rise to praise You,
because of Your righteous ordinances.
- ⁶³ Holding to all who fear You, I am a companion
with those who keep Your precepts.
- ⁶⁴ Heavy with Your covenant mercies is the earth O LORD;
teach me Your statutes!

U – TETH

- ⁶⁵ In goodness You have dealt with your servant,
O LORD, according to your word.
- ⁶⁶ Instill in me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.
- ⁶⁷ Idly I went astray before I was afflicted,
but now I keep your word.
- ⁶⁸ Impeccably good You are and You do good;
teach me your statutes.
- ⁶⁹ Insolent ones smear me with lies,
but I with my whole heart keep your precepts.
- ⁷⁰ Insensate like fat is their heart,
but I delight in your law.[†]
- ⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.
- ⁷² Incomparably more precious to me is the law[†] from Your mouth
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

U – YODH

- ⁷³ Joined by Your hands I am made and fashioned –
give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.
- ⁷⁴ Joyfully they who fear You will rejoice when they see me;
because I have hoped in Your word.
- ⁷⁵ Judgments of Yours, O LORD; I know are right;
and that in faithful care You have afflicted me.
- ⁷⁶ Justifying mercies of Your covenant, send to comfort me;
according to Your promise to Your servant.
- ⁷⁷ Judge that Your mercy may come – that I may live;
for Your law[†] is my delight.
- ⁷⁸ Justly put to shame the insolent; for with guile they have lied about me;
but as for me I will meditate on Your precepts.
- ⁷⁹ Justified ones who fear You; let them turn to me;
that they may know Your testimonies.
- ⁸⁰ Judge my heart blameless regarding Your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame.

ך – KAPH

- ⁸¹ Keeping watch for Your salvation, my soul longs,
yet I hope in Your word.
- ⁸² Keeping watch for Your promise, my eyes long.
I ask, “When will You comfort me?”
- ⁸³ Kept like a wineskin in smoke, I waste away,
yet I have not forgotten Your statutes.
- ⁸⁴ Know the days of Your servant! How long?
When will You bring my persecutors to judgment?
- ⁸⁵ Knaves have dug pitfalls for me;
openly contemptuous of Your law.[†]
- ⁸⁶ Keystones of truth; Your commandments all endure;
but I am persecuted with falsehood; help me!
- ⁸⁷ Killing me they sought, and almost wiped me from the earth.
But I have not forsaken Your precepts.
- ⁸⁸ Keep me in Your covenant mercies and give me life.
So I also may keep the testimonies of Your mouth.

ל – LAMEDH

- ⁸⁹ Long as eternity, O LORD,
Your word stands firm in the heavens.
- ⁹⁰ Legacy of Your faithfulness generation to generation;
You have established the earth and it stands fast.
- ⁹¹ Laid by Your ordinance they stand this day,
for all things are Your servants.
- ⁹² ‘Less Your law[†] had been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
- ⁹³ Loath am I to forget Your precepts,
for by them You have given me life.
- ⁹⁴ Liberate me; I am Yours;
for Your precepts I have sought!
- ⁹⁵ Lying in wait to destroy me are the wicked;
but I diligently consider Your testimonies.
- ⁹⁶ Limit to all perfection I have seen,
but Your commandment opens out beyond measure.

Q – MEM

- ⁹⁷ Mightily I love Your law[†]
It is my meditation all the day.
- ⁹⁸ Much wiser than my enemies Your commandment makes me,
for it is ever with me.
- ⁹⁹ More understanding I have than all my teachers,
for Your testimonies are my meditation.
- ¹⁰⁰ More than the aged I understand,
for I keep Your precepts.
- ¹⁰¹ My feet I hold back from every evil way,
in order to keep Your word.
- ¹⁰² Meander from Your ordinances, I will not,
for You have taught me.
- ¹⁰³ Magnificently sweet are Your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth.
- ¹⁰⁴ Mentored by Your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

Q – NUN

- ¹⁰⁵ Now is Your word a lamp for my feet;
and a light to my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ Noble the oath I have sworn; and confirmed –
to observe the ordinances of Your righteousness.
- ¹⁰⁷ Noisomely afflicted I am,
Give me life, O LORD, according to Your word!
- ¹⁰⁸ Nod with favor, O LORD, over the offerings of my mouth,
and teach me Your ordinances.
- ¹⁰⁹ Nonstop, my life is at risk,
but I do not forget Your law.[†]
- ¹¹⁰ Nets for me the wicked have laid,
but I do not stray from Your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Noble heritage forever are Your testimonies to me,
yes, they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² Noting Your statutes, I humble my heart to perform them;
forever, to the end.

ו – SAMECH

- 113 Outraged am I with the double-minded;
but Your law[†] I love.
- 114 Over me as a shield and hiding place You are;
I hope in Your word.
- 115 Out! Away from me you evil-doers;
that I may keep the commandments of my God!
- 116 On Your promise establish me, that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!
- 117 Oh, sustain me, that I may be safe,
and devote myself to Your statutes continually!
- 118 Off You cast all who go astray from Your statutes;
truly their cunning is in vain.
- 119 Out, like dross You discard all the wicked of the earth;
therefore, I treasure Your testimonies.
- 120 Overwhelmed is my flesh with awe of You;
and Your judgments I revere.

ו – AYIN

- 121 Performed have I what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.
- 122 Pledge of good, be for Your servant;
that the godless may not oppress me.
- 123 Pining away for Your salvation are my eyes,
and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.
- 124 Provide for Your servant according to Your covenant mercies,
and teach me Your statutes.
- 125 Perceptiveness give me – I am Your servant;
that I may know Your testimonies.
- 126 Pent-up is the time for the LORD to act;
they have broken Your law.[†]
- 127 Passionately therefore I treasure Your commandments,
above gold, above fine gold.
- 128 Pondering then Your precepts, I direct my steps in all of them;
every false way I hate.

9 – PE

- ¹²⁹ Remarkable are Your testimonies;
therefore my soul holds them close.
- ¹³⁰ Revealing Your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.
- ¹³¹ Rises a sigh from my lips;
because I long for Your commandments.
- ¹³² Return to me with Your grace;
with judgments favoring those who love Your name.
- ¹³³ Regulate my footsteps according to Your promise;
let not any iniquity get mastery over me.
- ¹³⁴ Rescue me from man's oppression;
that I may keep Your precepts.
- ¹³⁵ Restore to Your servant the light of Your face;
and teach me Your statutes.
- ¹³⁶ Rivers of tears flow from my eyes;
because we do not keep Your law.[†]

Y – TSADE

- ¹³⁷ Singularly righteous are You, O LORD,
and upright are Your judgments,
- ¹³⁸ setting forth Your testimonies in righteousness;
and in all faithfulness.
- ¹³⁹ Strident zeal consumes me,
because my foes forget Your words.
- ¹⁴⁰ Smelter-tested is Your promise,
and Your servant loves it.
- ¹⁴¹ Small am I and despised;
but I do not forget Your precepts.
- ¹⁴² Standing righteous forever is Your righteousness,
and Your law[†] is true.
- ¹⁴³ Sorrow and distress have come upon me;
but Your commandments are my delight.
- ¹⁴⁴ Set forever, Your testimonies are righteous,
give me understanding that I may live.

᠑ – QOPH

- ¹⁴⁵To the depths of my heart I cry out, answer me O LORD;
I will keep Your statutes!
- ¹⁴⁶To You I call; save me
that I may observe Your testimonies.
- ¹⁴⁷The first light dawning, I rise and cry for help;
I hope in Your words.
- ¹⁴⁸Though night watches pass, my eyes are awake
that I may meditate on Your promise.
- ¹⁴⁹Take heed to my voice according to Your covenant mercies;
O LORD, by Your favorable judgment preserve me.
- ¹⁵⁰They draw near who pursue with evil intent;
they are far from Your Law.[†]
- ¹⁵¹Truly, You are near, O LORD
and all Your commandments are trustworthy.
- ¹⁵²Time out of mind, I have known from Your testimonies
that You have established them forever.

᠑ – QOPH (revised to use Q as the first letter)

- ¹⁴⁵Quick of my heart cries out, answer me O LORD;
I will keep Your statutes!
- ¹⁴⁶Questing You I call; save me
that I may observe Your testimonies.
- ¹⁴⁷Quickly with the first light dawning, I rise and cry for help;
I hope in Your words.
- ¹⁴⁸Quietly night watches pass, my eyes waken;
that I may meditate on Your promise.
- ¹⁴⁹Quest O LORD, search out my voice;
by Your covenant mercies and Your favorable judgment preserve me.
- ¹⁵⁰Quarry of those who pursue with evil intent;
they are far from Your Law.[†]
- ¹⁵¹Quite trustworthy are your commandments O LORD,
Truly You are near.
- ¹⁵²Quoting Your words within, I have known
that Your testimonies resound forever.

7 – RESH

- ¹⁵³ Upon my affliction look – and deliver me,
for I do not forget Your law.[†]
- ¹⁵⁴ Undertake my cause and redeem me;
give me life according to Your promise.
- ¹⁵⁵ Unknown to the wicked is salvation,
for they do not seek Your statutes.
- ¹⁵⁶ Unequaled is Your mercy, O LORD;
give me life according to Your just decrees.
- ¹⁵⁷ Unnumbered are my persecutors and adversaries,
but from Your testimonies do not swerve.
- ¹⁵⁸ Umbrage I feel as I look upon the treacherous,
because they do not keep Your commands.
- ¹⁵⁹ Understand how I love Your precepts!
Give me life O LORD according to Your covenant mercies.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ultimate truth is the sum of Your word,
and forever are all the decrees of Your righteousness.

7 – SIN & SHIN

- ¹⁶¹ Void of cause, princes persecute me,
but my heart stands in awe of Your words.
- ¹⁶² Voicing aloud, I rejoice at Your word
like one who finds great spoil.
- ¹⁶³ Vainglory I hate and abhor,
but I love Your law.[†]
- ¹⁶⁴ Venerating You, seven times a day I praise
for Your just and righteous decrees.
- ¹⁶⁵ Very great peace have those who love Your law;[†]
nothing can make them stumble.
- ¹⁶⁶ Victorious salvation from You, O LORD, I await,
As I follow Your commandments.
- ¹⁶⁷ Vigilantly my soul keeps Your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.
- ¹⁶⁸ Vigilantly I keep Your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are open before You.

י – TAU

- 169 Welcome my cry before Your face, O LORD;
give me understanding according to Your word!
- 170 Welcome my supplication before Your face,
deliver me according to Your word.
- 171 Worshipful shouts my lips will pour forth,
for You teach me Your statutes.
- 172 Wake, my tongue! – to sing of Your word,
for all Your commandments are righteous!
- 173 With Your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen Your precepts.
- 174 Watchfully waiting for Your salvation, O LORD;
what great delight is Your Torah[†] to me!
- 175 Would that my soul may live and praise You,
while Your ordinances deliver me!
- 176 Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – seek Your servant!*
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!

*Or, “Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – You seek Your servant.
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!”

The translation depends on the vowel pointing.

Meditations



Prayers

Note: Meditations and prayers after verse 40 were written in 2022
after Rev. Willig suffered a massive stroke.

Ⲁ (ALEPH) – Verses 1-8

- ¹ Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law[†] of the LORD.
- ² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
who seek Him with their whole heart.
- ³ Also they do no wickedness,
but walk in His ways.
- ⁴ Appointed have You, Your precepts
to be kept diligently.
- ⁵ Ah, that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping Your statutes!
- ⁶ As a result I would not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all Your commandments.
- ⁷ Acclaim You with an upright heart, I will
as I learn Your righteous ordinances.
- ⁸ Attend to Your statutes I will;
do not forsake me beyond enduring!

Ⲁ (ALEPH) – Part 1

“Blessed”

Psalm 119 begins with one simple idea, held in the one word “blessed.” Although it is not the first word of the first verse, it is the word that is the head and the beginning of all that is in the psalm. And we are followers of someone who began the first great sermon of the New Testament with that same word, “Blessed,” nine times pronouncing the blessing. (Matthew 5:3-12) Remember also that at the beginning the Bible says, “And God blessed them and said . . .”

When it comes from the mouth of God, pronouncing the blessing is a beginning and creating. And then it is a re-beginning and re-creating thing. All the good things we are given, and every good thing we are created with comes through the first blessing – including the gift of being created in the image of God.

And then when it came time to redeem and save, the blessing came from Jesus to claim us back from where we had fallen. It is a re-creating that stands in sharp contrast to what we see and experience all around us. That’s why the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount can sound so out of place in our world. They are true because He says them, not because they are a part of a hidden truth or a hidden wisdom. God speaks them and begins to re-make the truths of life. As the old Jewish saying goes, “When Messiah comes He will speak the Law new.” And that saying is a foreshadowing of the end when He who sits on the throne says, “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

Psalm 119 begins with the idea “blessed” as the word of God calls to us and invites us to come along and see how the Word of God – Jesus – changes every part of every thing.

How does He do this?

The blessings of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) are not just spoken by God into the void or into the stuff of the universe. Jesus the Son of God makes them true first in Himself. He is the Savior who brings His truth and His salvation into our world and into our lives. These “blessed are . . .” statements can only be true in us and for us if they are true first in and about Jesus:

He is the poor in spirit taking on Himself my sins and yours so we may have the kingdom of heaven. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

He is the One who mourns, so we may be comforted. (Isaiah 53:3)

He is the meek, taking the lower place so we may be exalted and inherit heaven and earth. (John 13:3-5)

He is the One hungering and thirsting for righteousness, but it is for us to be made righteous through His blood. (Matthew 4:2 and following; John 19:28)

He is the merciful, so that in Him all who believe receive mercy. (John 8:2-11)

He is the peacemaker, bringing us into His peace, calling us sons of God, and sending us to others with His word of peace. (John 14:27).

He is the One persecuted for righteousness sake, who has the keys of the kingdom and opens up eternal life for us. (John 10:32)

And He is the One still reviled and talked against, so that when the time comes, we may hear His voice before the Father and all the angels speaking for us and claiming us as His own.

The Messiah

There was a saying among the rabbis that when Messiah comes, He will give the Law anew. One designation of Law is Torah, and specifically the first five books of the Bible: Genesis through Deuteronomy. Interestingly scholars have correlated those first five books with the five longest teaching chapters in Matthew. That would correlate Genesis with the Sermon on the Mount. In Genesis, the first words of creation were *יְהִי אֹר* (yehi 'or) – “let there be light”. The first words in the Sermon on the Mount were “Blessed are”. They are, both of those examples, creative words of God, in the saying of them He makes them so and makes them true. It is not that the Beatitudes are words of wisdom, hidden words of wisdom, or even heavenly words of wisdom. They are words of the Creating God. In the speaking he makes them true. So, our Messiah shows who He is in the authority of His speaking. (a good excursus on the word Blessed can be found in the commentary on Luke, Volume One, by Arthur Just, who also goes the next step and says that the authority to make them true is not only found in the words of Christ, but also the life of Christ. He is in His life the Blessed One, and we are blessed as we are connected with His life.) Going a step further, the blessing comes to us because He takes our failure to live the Torah, taking it on Himself so we can have the blessing given over from Him to us. And that counterpoint and contrast is brought out in Psalm 119 verses 3 – 4. Verse one “Absolutely blest”, verse two “Altogether blessed”, verse three “Also they do no wickedness but walk in His ways”, “Appointed have You, Your precepts to be kept diligently.”

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, may I find my blessings always and only in You. Call me into the walk of faith and the walk of discipleship that I may learn wondrous things from Your word. Help me in the

middle of the changes and chances of this life to set my eyes on the true joys and true treasure that is found only in You. Amen.

א (ALEPH) – Part 2

- ¹ Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law^t of the LORD.
- ² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart.

Verses 1-2 “Walking Among the Ways and Works of God”

Verse 1 opens up into an amazing thought, a remarkable idea. What does it mean to walk in the “Torah” of the LORD?

Torah is the word that is almost always translated in English as “Law.” And once we hear “Law” we immediately think of commandments – the should’s and should-not’s. But the word Torah means so much more. In fact the Torah is the first 5 books of the Bible with every word from God and every thing that happens in them.

It is God revealing Himself, God creating, and then blessing Adam and Eve; and through them all of humanity (Genesis 1:26 ff). It is the story of how God, when He found Adam and Eve having wandered off and rebelling, did not sweep them and us away into destruction; but instead promised a Savior, the Seed of the woman. He would be born for us and would conquer sin and death; and He would be wounded in the battle. It is the story of God calling Abraham to go to the mountain of God and act out “the sacrifice”—the sacrifice on the mountain where only God the Father would actually go through with it. So Abraham goes three days, puts the wood on his son, answers Isaac by saying, “God Himself will provide the Lamb,” and then receives his son, his only son whom he loves, back from the dead. It is a picture of Jesus.

It is the story of God redeeming His people, through the blood of the lamb, again a picture of Jesus. He brings them through the waters, and to His mountain. He says, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out . . .” and calls them His people. We could go on endlessly, but . . .

These are the events, the scenery and the heritage of our lives. It’s like the landmarks, the scenery and all the familiar places of our youth; and what it would be like if we could go back and find them just like they were, landmarks that endure and places to savor the memories. But these are the landmarks of God, the places and memories of His plan of salvation. Walking in the Torah is walking through His story and finding things are just like He said they would be. When we see all the parts of how God has revealed His love, His will, and His plan of salvation; walking in these things is very special. It goes way beyond rules and commandments. It is a much deeper experience. It is at the beginning of everything we are and everything in our lives.

To walk in the Torah of the Lord is to journey through life, from one day to the next with the things of God all around us. It is, within our souls, to look at the world a certain way – filled with the promises of Eden, the drama of God talking with Abraham, the promise of the lamb “who takes away the sin of the world,” and the word of God as our map through all the questions of right and wrong. It is to live in the relationship that God has given us in our creation and in Jesus Christ.

Only one person has ever truly walked in the Law / the Torah of the Lord. This is the One whose way is blameless. It is Jesus and the Torah is His story. He is “the seed of the woman,” the “Lamb of God,” the Passover, the way through the sea to freedom. He is also the One who takes the curse – though He was blameless and innocent He took our punishment.

By His cross and tomb He takes my story and makes it His; and then He takes His story and makes it mine. My sin is placed on Him. And what is written about Him becomes mine: blessed, blameless and called a child of God. We are clothed by the holiness of Jesus and will stand before God innocent and pure. What an amazing gift of grace!

And then we look at the world all around us; and we see the hand of God in so many things that happen in our lives. We go through the day with an awareness of God. He is present with us everywhere. And at the end of the day, we rest from all the turmoil. We commit ourselves into the hands of God, and trust in His mercy and His goodness.

Walking with God also means that this world is not our home. We have an amazing relationship with God and all the promises of eternity. We look back on our history, and look over our life (thinking again of Abraham) and we say, “My father was a wandering Aramean.” (Deuteronomy 26:5) It is both part of our family history and the hope of our future. As Abraham did we also “look forward to a city . . . whose designer and builder is God;” (Hebrews 11:10) a city, right now being formed and gathered by Jesus Christ.

That is why the first verse, that talks about walking in the Torah of the LORD, leads right into v. 2. “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies.” We keep, treasure and hold these things in our memories.

God has told us about His love and His plan for us. He has witnessed to His Grace and mercy through every act and part of the plan of salvation. And the witnesses and the testimonies are more than we could ever list. Read Hebrews 11. And then remember the “faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead” Jesus Christ. The greatest of His testimonies is the one written in the flesh of His own hands. It is the testimony that we will one day see in the hands of Jesus when He gathers all His people on the Day of Resurrection.

Prayer:

Lord and Savior, You walked with Abraham, showing Your plan of salvation. You walked with Moses and led the people of Israel through the wilderness. And then You walked with Your disciples, feeding, healing, praying, dying and rising. You did all this so I might walk with You forever. As You filled their lives so fill my days with the things of God. Let me understand Your ways and Your purpose in gathering Your kingdom. Lead my heart and mind that they may be filled with Your words and may I see Your hand and Your mercy in every part of life. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.

X (ALEPH) – Part 3

- ³ Also they do no wickedness,
but walk in His ways.
- ⁴ Appointed have You, Your precepts
to be kept diligently.
- ⁵ Ah, that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping Your statutes!
- ⁶ As a result I would not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all Your commandments.
- ⁷ Acclaim You with an upright heart, I will
as I learn Your righteous ordinances.
- ⁸ Attend to Your statutes I will;
do not forsake me beyond enduring!

Verses 3-8 “Where Sinner/Saints Find Hope”

Can our lives fit the words of v. 3 “they do no wickedness”? It is a question we cannot escape. V. 3 sets the mirror of the perfect law before us and we fall short. We are condemned. But God stoops down with His mercy. The second half of v. 3 says “but walk in His ways.” What are God’s ways?

Look closely at the ways of the One who said, “follow Me.” His ways are mercy, grace, forgiveness and so much more. Jesus said, “Come to Me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls . . .” These are the ways and the works that God loves to do.

The ways of God are the way to Jerusalem and the way to Calvary. They are the path He walked to purchase me; and He calls me there to know that I am His. The ways of God include the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34) and walking with us in eternal life.

Our psalm called to us and invited us to walk in the “Torah” of the LORD – to have our world filled with the things and the acts of God. Now it calls us to walk in His ways. This means to go through life with God’s ways and His doings all around us, and to follow and have our lives molded and shaped in harmony with His words and His ways..

The next 3 verses (4-6) are prayers voicing desire and longing – to be keeping His precepts (God says how I am to live); and to be steadfast in His statutes (God declares what is to be).

If I could only be in complete harmony with God’s ways, His precepts, and His statutes; why then I would never be put to shame. If only . . .

But again, God stoops down to me. He comes into our lives and into our world. Jesus gives us His words. His words do not tell me what I must do to win eternal life. They point to His mercy. They tell how He has won the victory for me. He has carried the burden, suffered the punishment, won the victory and opened up life. Now I find myself being built on His words; and on His words I am like a house built on the rock. No matter what comes; no matter the

wind, the storm, the floods even – we are built on His words, and they are a firm foundation. They are eternal. (Matthew 7:24-25)

He is the One who said about the Law, “until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away” (Matthew 5:18) He says to us, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35) The word of the Lord endures forever. But those words are words of life and words of promise to us. He speaks them to me, into my soul; and when the eternal word of God is in my soul – that is eternal life! We thank and praise and celebrate what Jesus has given us! (How can we do anything else?) So we say with the psalm, “I will” “acclaim You;” and “I will” “attend to Your statutes.” This Word of God truly is our life and salvation!

God sets His Promises, His words and hopes before us in so many ways. He tenderly invites us. He calls to our hearts. But I am a sinner. I know that I am not worthy to have Him stay in my life. The last prayer in Part “Aleph” is “do not forsake me” – specifically “do not forsake me beyond enduring!” (Verse 8) “Beyond enduring” would mean to be left by God, to have an eternity of being without Him. The sinner cries out with this prayer and yet knows: It is actually what I deserve!

But again God is there with His mercy. Jesus came to take what we have deserved, even taking up the very word “forsaken.” If there was ever a thing beyond enduring it was for the sinless Son of God to be forsaken and condemned for others’ sins. He was forsaken so I would never have to be. In this way – the most extreme of all acts of salvation – He has taken us sinners brought us in, given us His own holiness and made us His saints. To God alone be the glory!

Prayer:

Lord, Your word calls, Your word restores, and You surround me with Your words and promises. Help me to treasure the “Yes!”, the “Amen!”, and the promises in Jesus; so the sustaining, strengthening promises I have in Him may fill my hours and moments, my days and nights. Amen.

1 (BETH) – Verses 9-16

- ⁹ By what means can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to Your word.
- ¹⁰ Bending all my heart I seek You;
let me not wander from Your commandments!
- ¹¹ Buried deep in my heart I hold Your promise,
that I might not sin against You.
- ¹² Blessèd are You, O LORD;
teach me Your statutes!
- ¹³ By my lips I declare
all the just decrees of Your mouth.
- ¹⁴ Blissful, I exult in the way of Your testimonies
as over all riches.
- ¹⁵ Bound to Your precepts I meditate
and I fix my eyes on Your ways.
- ¹⁶ Boundlessly I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

1 (BETH) – Part 1

Verses 9-10 “Remember Your Creator in the Days of Your Youth” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Where do I; where can I find a firm foundation? On what do I build my life? On what can I rest my soul when so much in life is shifting and uncertain?

I heard a saying decades ago: “Only when you are prepared to die are you then prepared to live.” All too often we think of our youth, our childhood, and our teenage years as a time of carefree wandering through life, putting off the days when we will have to get serious. The God of the Bible calls us to know Him in our youth. Never underestimate the importance of how God calls us even from our early years. Never underestimate the potential in your life, or in those around you of following, of having discipleship beginning to form at a young age, or of beginning early on to learn to share God’s love. One of the wisest people in the history of the world was Solomon. He looked back over his life and wrote down what he had learned. Part of it is, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth . . .” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Think about David as a youth learning to walk with God and then standing up to danger and evil. Think about a young girl in Damascus telling about the God of Israel (2 Kings 5); or about the prophet Jeremiah called and sent by God in his youth (Jeremiah 1:6-7); or about Timothy the young pastor (1 Timothy 4:12). Through the centuries millions of us have learned this truth; that in our early years Jesus invites us to follow Him. He calls to us, He speaks His words of life and our lives are changed. All over the world He is even now calling children, young people and young adults to “Follow Me.” We hear story upon story of God calling the young. It makes sense. After all, Jesus was only a youth, 12 years old, when He was there in the temple with the

Rabbis and teachers of the law asking and answering questions, and amazing them. (Luke 2:46-47)

Think about the life and the prayer life of Jesus. As the psalm says, "From my youth I was cast upon You." Jesus grew from infancy in a constant walk with God, a constant walk of faith. He tells us of His prayer life in Isaiah (50:4). "Morning by morning He awakens me; He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught." And earlier in the verse, "the Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary." Notice how Jesus treasured the word; how He focused all His heart on the words and promises of God.

Jesus has words of hope and comfort for our time of need. All of this comes from standing under the trials of life holding to those promises. And so He calls us to follow Him in every time and age of our life.

And then realize this truth. Even before our youth, God has called to us and invited us into relationship with Him. He knew me before I was me. He said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. . ." (Jeremiah 1:5) David says, "You knitted me together in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13) And John the Baptist was still within the womb when he leaped for joy responding in faith to Jesus. (Luke 1:41-44)

Prayer:

Lord, call us to You in the days of our youth. Build in our hearts the foundation of Your word. Let my life be intertwined, woven together with, and held together by Your promises. Let me grow in faith, and in my soul let me treasure You in all that You are. In that way let me receive Your blessing and Your discipline, that I may grow as a disciple of Jesus. Amen.

1 (BETH) – Part 2

¹¹ Buried deep in my heart I hold Your promise,
that I might not sin against You.

¹² Blessed are You, O LORD;
teach me Your statutes!

Verses 11-12 “Lord, Build My Faith and Life on Your Words”

Therefore – because God has planted His word in my soul – because He has put His hand on me – only because of that – I bend my heart; turning to seek God. Deep in my heart I hold and treasure His promise.

Notice verse 11 does not say “promises.” Yes, there are many promises from God, too many to count. But they all come together in the One Promise. This One Promise is the Promise with hands and feet. He is God Himself who gives Himself *for* us, to win us back from being lost. It is Jesus who brings all the promises together in His cross and empty tomb! And He gives Himself *to* us, so that our life is bound together with His life and His life is connected to our lives forever. His life flows into and through our lives. He binds Himself to us.

Day by day He is our Savior, our Shepherd, and our Brother. Week after week He gives Himself through words of blessing and in the meal of bread and wine. Together with His body and blood He gives the promise, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Day and night He hears my prayers; and all through the years to come He has promised to be with me.

How do I respond to all this? How can I respond? I am caught up in the wonder of it all! I have a treasure that is beyond price, beyond riches, beyond imagining! His word, His grace, His Spirit, His love – all of these work deeply in the soul. They move, they call, they invite and they draw me to Him. They change me. The promise comes from God and is enfleshed in Jesus. He comes into this world to bring the promises in Himself. He then teaches and brings the promises into our ears, from God, spoken deep within me and those words and promises begin to change me – first by creating a new heart and new me. And then God’s word works out into every part of me. Because of what He has done, I want to guard this treasure through the strength of His word. I want to desire what God desires.

So, the whole idea of wandering off from God and forgetting His word, His commandments and His promises – Preserve me dear Lord, may I never! This is not because I am afraid of God and think I had better obey; but simply because He is my God who has loved and saved me, and these are His words. They are my treasure. It is like something I learned about my grandfather. When my parents were going through papers, they found letters from my grandmother, and exclaimed, “He saved every one of her letters from before they were married!” So it is with God’s words and promises to me. They are His. They are from Him. And they call my soul. They are love letters from God.

All of this leads to the cry. It wells up and comes from deep inside. “Blessed are You, O LORD; teach me Your statutes!” What do I want, O Lord? I want more of You!

Prayer:

Blessed are You Lord, my Savior and God. Blessed are You for Your promises of life, salvation, glory, fellowship. Blessed are You for every answer to prayer; and blessed are You for the hidden blessings held within Your wisdom. Blessed are You because You are the promise and You are the blessing. Guide me and lead me in Your word all through life . . . and forever! Amen.

⌒ (BETH) – Part 3

- ¹³ By my lips I declare
all the just decrees of Your mouth.
- ¹⁴ Blissful, I exult in the way of Your testimonies
as over all riches.
- ¹⁵ Bound to Your precepts I meditate
and I fix my eyes on Your ways.
- ¹⁶ Boundlessly I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

Verses 13-16 “Celebrating Blessings”

It comes out of the deep relationship (the deep connection) with God. It comes to us through His words and promises. And remember that the Word of God became flesh, and in Him are gathered all the promises of God.

Out of this comes the celebration and praise. Jesus said to His disciples on the way to the cross, “I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:22) It is a joy founded and built on the work of Jesus. So:

By my lips I declare
Blissful I exult
I meditate
I fix my eyes . . .

The wondrous works, the amazing ways of God come together and they are the story of salvation. These are the testimonies of God – the telling of all that God has done from the beginnings of the promise (Genesis 3:15); to the amazing pictures in Genesis 22; Exodus 12; Leviticus 14; Isaiah 51; to the story of Jesus entering our world (Luke 1-2). And then the Testimonies of God come to us in the preaching of Jesus, from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7); to the words of Jesus before the Council and Pilate . . . and on the Cross: “Father, forgive them” . . . “Today you shall be with Me in paradise” . . . “It is finished.” And then the testimonies of God call us into the joy of Easter in the garden (John 20), on the Emmaus road (Luke 24) and in the upper room (Luke 24 and John 20). These are so clearly the testimonies of God that the onlookers in Acts 2 said “We hear them telling . . . the mighty works of God.”

This is the one story – the word of God calling to us in Jesus is where God is bringing all our stories together – gathering us together within “the mighty acts of God,” the story of Jesus. To have and to know Jesus is worth more than all other riches. Celebrate! Sing for joy! Maybe even dance! You have everything in Jesus because of the cross and empty tomb! That is why we are right there with the psalmist:

(v. 13) By our lips we declare all the just decrees of Your mouth – because Your words declare that I am justified, made holy by Jesus and all that He has done.

(v. 14) Blissful, we exult in the way of Your testimonies as over all riches – they are our true riches; riches of life and blessings forever.

(v. 15) Bound to Your precepts we meditate – we want to think on and ponder and hold in our souls what You have decided and set down.

(v. 15) We fix our eyes on Your ways – focused in on what You have done and how You have done it.

(v. 16) Boundlessly we delight in Your statutes – being taught by God is beyond compare; learning from Jesus is better than anything else. So it should go without saying that we will not forget Your word – because of all that Your Word is to us.

But we are who we are. Lord, by Your Spirit keep Your word in our hearts and minds.

What more is there to say? The delight in God's word and His teaching knows no bounds. There is no limit. The blessings, the joy, the peace, the life and everything else. The celebration is endless as God's walk with us is endless. How could we; how would we ever forget His word?

Prayer:

Lord, fill my heart, my eyes, my thoughts and my words with the joy of Your blessings; with exulting in the gift of life, peace and forgiveness in Jesus; with the wonder of the blessings to come; and with the sweetness of Your ways of walking with me. Amen.

λ (GIMMEL) – Verses 17-24

- ¹⁷ Charitably deal with Your servant,
that I may live and observe Your word.
- ¹⁸ Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your law.[†]
- ¹⁹ Cast off; I am a sojourner on the earth;
hide not Your commandments from me!
- ²⁰ Consumed is my soul with longing
all the time for Your ordinances.
- ²¹ Cursed, insolent ones You rebuke;
who wander from Your commandments.
- ²² Contempt and scorn take away from me,
for Your testimonies I have kept.
- ²³ Crowned princes even, conspiring against me,
still Your servant will meditate on Your statutes.
- ²⁴ Cherished indeed are Your testimonies to me;
they are my counselors.

λ (GIMMEL) – Part 1

Verses 17-20 “Keeping it Real”

For the new Christian when it gets difficult, everything should be blessing and delight. The heart is reconciled. Sins forgiven. All is founded and built on the Mighty Acts of God in Jesus. Why must the psalmist cry out? How can it be that God should seem distant? But that is where he finds himself, so much that he calls to God to deal charitably, or he will not even survive.

And there is an added desire woven in with the basic cry – “and observe Your word.” Life is not simply to continue breathing and having a heartbeat. It is to be connected to God through His word.

Going one step deeper, it is an interesting phrase “observe Your word.” It goes beyond hearing the word of God; works out from believing God’s word; develops even beyond meditating on God’s word. It means to look, watch, trust, and see with eyes of faith as God’s word works into and changes every part of life, as every bit of history is taken captive by the kingdom and plan of God. To see that by faith calls for more faith and a different vision than any of us can bring. “Charitably deal with Your servant.”

We might think of Peter in Matthew 16 suddenly seeing, “You are the Christ,” and Jesus saying, “Blessed are you Simon . . . flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Even more to the point, think of Jesus in the garden praying, “Father, if it is possible [and the answer is, “No”] let this cup pass [again, “no”], yet not my will, but Yours.” “Let Me live and see Your word acting, conquering, victorious.” But there is only one way for that to happen and it is the cross. Isaiah 53 says, “Because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the

transgressors.” (v. 12) Because of that He will live and observe “Your word.” Again, “out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied.” (v. 11) In this way Jesus has joined us in our separation, our sojourning – to find us, to meet us and to bring us back by showing us that He knows our cry and makes it His own.

Verse 18 repeats the prayer slightly changed to open it up even more. “Clear-sighted make my eyes.” If God does not do this, if the Holy Spirit does not guide and open these things to us there is no way we can see any of the acts of God or any of His Word or grasp any of the revelation (Torah) of God.

When we cry out for a word, and the times are many, there is a story out of the Old Testament. Who is Shimei. It is the story of David and David’s sin. He saw and lusted after Bathsheba. Nathan came to pronounce Judgement. David repented (Psalm 51) and was forgiven. While there were consequences, David continued on as king. In a certain way, he got away with it. But the consequences showed up in his children. Amnon lusted for his sister Tamar. Lured her into being alone with him and raped her. Absalom, Tamar’s brother killed Amnon. David let these things go. Years later, Absalom rebelled against David and drove him out of Jerusalem. As David rode away from the throne and kingdom, there was a certain Shimei, son of Saul, Who confronted him, stood on the hill next to the road and threw rocks, dirt and filth at him, while calling out curses. One of David’s men asked, “Do you want me to go take his head off?” David replied, “No, let him be. Maybe the Lord has sent him.” In that moment David feels himself having gotten away with something and that is the worst thing that could have happened to him. He feels himself separated from God, without God’s word, without God’s law, without consequences. If your actions have no consequences, then your actions do not matter. If your actions do not matter, then you do not matter. If you do not matter, then you are separated from the eternal, insignificant and meaningless. That is to have your feet at the edge of the cliff, and over the cliff is the pit. That pit is to have the word “Meaningless” written over your actions, your life, and you, yourself. In order to not be meaningless, we must stand before God in terms of right and wrong, good and evil. Only then do our lives matter. To not matter is to be nothing. So David cries out because he needs the word of God, even if it is a word of judgement and wrath. The question, who is Shimei, is the crying out. The words of David, “Let him be” is the crying out of the ultimate need of all of mankind, to have meaning, significance, to matter.

(Verses 19-20) This is the only answer we have in our wandering. For all those times we feel cast off (and they are many), or a sojourner (wandering without plan or home), when the word of God seems closed and we call out for a word, a commandment, a revelation – for anything! When we are overtaken with longing and it gets to the point where it seems to be “all the time,” there is the Sojourner of God, the Lamb forsaken, the Servant (“Behold My Servant!” ⁽¹⁾) struck down. And He is there to bring the charitable dealing – the GRACE ⁽²⁾ of God with the wonderful “It is finished,” and we are connected again!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You came to me in my wandering, bearing my burdens and meeting me in the place of separation. When God seems distant, when heaven seems closed, remind me of Your

sojourning, of Your walk of faith, of Your prayer in the garden, and how You know all that is in my soul. Help me when I am in the middle of things I do not understand – help me then to lean on You and know that no matter what anything seems or feels like; You are my Lamb forsaken and my companion in my journey every day and every hour. Amen.

Notes:

¹ For further reading:

The Servant Songs of Isaiah show us Jesus as the suffering Savior. Piece by piece His ministry is revealed through:

Isaiah 42:1-9 – the Servant will bring salvation to the world.

Isaiah 42:18-21 – the Servant must walk by faith, not by sight, and so exalt the words and promises of God.

Isaiah 44:1-5 – the Servant brings together all the Old Testament purposes of God and sends His people out as witnesses to the world.

Isaiah 49:1-13 – the Servant, sent first to the people of Israel, has His mission expanded to the whole world.

Isaiah 50:4-9 – the Servant draws His strength from the word of God in order to comfort and encourage, and in order to face the suffering that is involved in bringing us salvation.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 – the Servant goes to suffering for our forgiveness.

Isaiah 61:1-3 – this is the preaching of the Servant, as preached in the Synagogue at Nazareth, and it describes the results of His ministry.

² GRACE = God's Riches At Christ's Expense

λ (GIMMEL) – Part 2

- ²¹ Cursed, insolent ones You rebuke;
who wander from Your commandments.
- ²² Contempt and scorn take away from me,
for Your testimonies I have kept.
- ²³ Crowned princes even, conspiring against me,
still Your servant will meditate on Your statutes.
- ²⁴ Cherished indeed are Your testimonies to me;
they are my counselors.

Verses 21-24 “My Hope in a Foreign World”

We are connected again in Christ. We have life. We belong to God. But we still live as strangers in this world. We cannot get away from that. In fact, belonging to God means we are even more strangers here. Around us there are those that the psalm calls “insolent,” and they have things to say, insults to fling, and things to do. We find this out when we dare to talk about right and wrong (God’s commandments, and especially in our day the commandment about morality); or about Jesus as the only way of salvation.

Whether we are new to the faith or have many years as Christians we want to tell about Jesus. But the message about salvation in Jesus often is greeted with contempt and scorn. Sometimes it is outright rejection, or else an impatient “we’re tired of hearing about Jesus.” We really are strangers here! The Christian and his faith is mocked. And talked about. And things happen: in school; at work; at church and in our other relationships. As a pastor friend once said, “They hate you because of your good character.” What do we do? How do we face this?

God answers with a warning and a promise. (Law and Gospel.) God rebukes the insolent, the ones who wander away, who disregard His commandments. There are those who say God’s opinion of right and wrong just does not matter. “The Lord does not see.” The Lord does not hear. The Lord will not act. (Psalm 94:7) Their turning away is not even a questioning; but rather a “who cares.” Right and wrong don’t count. And they don’t just leave God; they abandon what they are made to be – moral and spiritual beings. Pride against God turns into something strange, and we hear them teaching that we are nothing but smart animals. It has turned upside-down, and the self-degrading is stunning. But this is the fall, and this is the curse, and we are all caught in it. It is a contempt, a scorn, and a rebuke we have all deserved. How can we find our way free of this?

It is Jesus! Again, the answer is found only in the one who has taken the scorn and contempt on Himself. He was talked about, ridiculed as out of his mind, plotted against, and for Him it was the rulers, all who had power. But even more, Jesus took on Himself the scorn and condemnation that was hanging over us. A part of the suffering of the cross, was the shame of the cross. Judged and condemned by the earthly authorities, both state and church. He was also judged and forsaken by God the Father. He presented Himself before His Father with all the sins of the whole human race, and accepted the shame and condemnation that went with it. The verse in the Old Testament says, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” and that

verse was prepared for Jesus. So, Paul says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13) He has lifted off of us the rebuke and the shame and carried it away so we may be free forever. (John 8:36)

Lord, because You have taken this contempt, rebuke, and curse away; help me then to bear the contempt and scorn that comes from belonging to You. Even if the high and mighty, the cool and popular in this world conspire to shame, call me Your own and it is enough.

With that in mind the psalmist holds to the words and promises of God. He keeps the “testimonies,” the story of God’s saving work in Christ, because in Jesus we have all the riches of God promised and given. He meditates on God’s statutes – how God has set up and put together the world. He turns them over and over in his mind remembering the promise to come, “Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5), that even now everything is being made over and recreated, founded on the cross of Jesus and His empty tomb. “God has exalted Him to the highest place and given Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” (Philippians 2:9-11) But He is exalted and everything is built around Him because He took the lowest place, because Jesus “became obedient unto death, even death on the cross”. (Philippians 2:8)

This is the way Jesus walked, holding to the testimonies, the plan and story of salvation. As the psalmist, and as we treasure the testimonies and meditate on the statutes, we are doing nothing else than hearing His voice calling and saying, “Follow Me,” and knowing our Shepherd has called us.

His voice tells us of salvation. His testimonies lead us. His teachings are our counselors. And how do we see them but to cherish these words of life. In this dark world, in this strange and alien place they connect us with life and truth; and with who we are in Christ.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd, be with me in this world where it is so often hard to follow You and stand for what is right. Give me courage by Your Gospel, by Your walk of faith and by the promise of Your cross and empty tomb. Let Your words take such deep root in my heart that they may guide me in every place and in every situation to live as Your disciple. Amen.

T – DALETH

- ²⁵ Dejected, my soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to Your word!
- ²⁶ Disclosing my ways I spoke; and You answered me;
teach me Your statutes!
- ²⁷ Discipleship in Your precepts, make me to understand;
and I will meditate on Your wondrous works.
- ²⁸ Dissolving for sorrow is my soul;
strengthen me according to Your word!
- ²⁹ Deceitful ways put far from me
and graciously teach me Your law! †
- ³⁰ Discipleship of faithfulness I have chosen;
Your ordinances I set before me.
- ³¹ Devotedly I cling to Your testimonies, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame!
- ³² Discipleship to Your commandments I will pursue,
when You enlarge my heart!

T (DALETH) – Part 1

Verses 25-28 “The Struggle of Discipleship”

“Come, follow Me” He says and calls us to turn away from the things of this world. And no matter how glorious is the turning toward, with all the promises, glory, forgiveness, life . . .; still the turning away is hard. It will involve “Thy will be done” and it will include the breaking and hindering of my will – not only the things of this earth; also the heart of this earth. My soul clings to the dust with a love for the dust and trouble letting go of the dust. I am dejected, disappointed, and hoped for better of myself.

Revive me Lord. Give me life again! Give me that life that comes only from You, because that is the only life that endures forever. Give me life by Your living Word.

And so, I empty my soul, bringing my confession of who I am and how I am. Taught by Your word I learn the truth about me, and I say it to You, no matter how painful it is . . . and You answer! You speak the truth about Yourself as the Savior, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God; and about me as Your own, bought with the price of Your own blood.

With Messiah these verses open up in another wondrous way. The verse says, “My soul clings to the dust.” Look in Genesis 1 - 3 to find out more about the dust. God formed Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life. (Years ago, there was a very nice sermon about moon rocks. It went viral. It pointed out that the difference between moon rocks and the dust of the earth is that moon rocks never had the breath of life breathed into them.) So even though I am dust, I have had God breathe life into me. And even though I will return to dust, it is dust that He formed and fashioned and gave to it the promise of life eternal. Going on

God takes a rib from the dust of the earth (Adam) and forms it into a woman, Eve. And further, when we get to Psalm 139, “My frame was not hidden from You when it was secretly wrought in the depths of the earth.” In this thought, the womb is part of the dust of the earth, where the form of each infant is created in secret. (“There in the depths of the earth.”) Messiah holds on to this dust of the earth and we read how He took the little children in His arms and blessed them. In our congregation, Cathy has made a point of the verse in Psalm 139, and applying it to Lily, her daughter. So, to expand this means all the children who are born, who are small and weak, who struggle to learn, who suffer from diseases. It means you Lennon and you Landon, my grandsons, Your Messiah Jesus holds on to you. And you Lily, your Friend Jesus holds on to you. Earlier I questioned why I cling to this dust with all the promises of God given to me for eternity. After all, this dust is my sinful self, and living in this sinful self in this sinful world is part of what the Bible calls tribulation (suffering). So, the other question then is, why does Messiah cling to this dust. For Him to cling to this dust meant that the deeds of this dust would be placed on His shoulders, and He would answer for those, my sins, and likewise with the rest of humanity. But He will. He insists. He claims this dust as His. In one of my songs “The Living Lord Sits down with Us.” verse five says “In my forgiveness and new life claims His own victory. Claims His own victory.”

These are the statutes – the truths that You are writing into the whole creation, making the whole creation new. Teach me these, for as You teach them my soul hungers for them – indeed I find a new hunger for them as I learn them; and the more I learn them the more I hunger for them.

And this is how You call me into discipleship: “discipleship in Your precepts” (v. 27); “discipleship of faithfulness” (v. 30); and “discipleship to Your commandments” (v. 32).

First is “discipleship in Your precepts” and v. 27 speaks of it with longing – “make me to understand.” God’s precepts are His teachings of what should be in His universe, in the world and in life. They have to do with wondrous things, with the amazing acts of God, creation by His word, and then salvation through His blood! The psalmist calls out in prayer that his soul may meditate on what God does, looking to God’s works and not to the things of dust. We want to have our heart and soul focused on the acts of God and not distracted by the many lures of the world that are nothing but dust and must return to dust.

But we find ourselves wandering and unable to walk as disciples with the dedication and spiritual vision we long for; so, in our soul there is sorrow – “dissolving for sorrow,” and then the cry comes forth again, “strengthen me!”

Strengthen how? The only way possible – again and again the same answer – by the Word, in the Word, according to the Word! And the hunger becomes deeper and deeper for the words and promises of God. Without them we have no strength. They are our life because those words and promises are entirely bound up in the person of Jesus and He is our life! He is God’s “Yes” and God’s “Amen” to us.

What is the reason why discipleship in God’s precepts is this – this focus on His works and being given strength from His Word in the path of discipleship? Simply this: It was the path and walk of Jesus. With His eyes set on the plan of God, drawing His strength from the words

and promises of God, He is the Great Disciple. He is “the faithful witness” (Revelation 1:5) who speaks what He hears from His Father and does what He has learned to do from His Father. (Jesus talks about His relationship with His Father and uses words of discipleship in detail in John chapter 5 and then all the way through the rest of John, to Easter)

The prayer life of Jesus is described in Isaiah 50:4-7. He talks about the “instructed tongue” and says, “He awakens My ear to hear as those who are taught.” The Savior took His place under the word of God – day by day, as He did in the 40 days of fasting and prayer, saying “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) He took that place of prayer so that He could sustain the weary “with a word”. (Isaiah 50:4) The work and the teachings of Jesus come from that deep relationship with His Father through Scripture and prayer. Therefore, His face was set on the path of our salvation.

Prayer:

Lord, call to me. Call to my soul through Your word. Call to my heart through Your promises and lead me away from the things of dust. As You have walked the road, teach me the path of discipleship – to follow You, to seek and hold to the things of eternity. They are the treasure You have won and earned and given to me; and for them I praise You. Amen.

T – DALETH

- ²⁹ Deceitful ways put far from me
and graciously teach me Your law!†
- ³⁰ Discipleship of faithfulness I have chosen;
Your ordinances I set before me.
- ³¹ Devotedly I cling to Your testimonies, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame!
- ³² Discipleship to Your commandments I will pursue,
when You enlarge my heart!

T (DALETH) – Part 2

Verses 29-32 “oligopistoi”

There is a Hebrew word “Derek.” It means “road” or “street” -- the road you walk on, or the path from one place to another. But just like in English (and many other languages) it has a deeper meaning. Derek is “my path in life” or “the way I follow.” It is the path of the soul; the way of the inner life. And remember, before they were called Christians, what the early Christians called themselves all through the book of Acts was “Followers of the Way.”

That’s part of the whole idea of discipleship. Jesus called His disciples to follow. Not only the 12 – every one of us. “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” “Love one another as I have loved you.” “If anyone would come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me.” As the disciples followed they learned from Jesus. But as the disciple learns – he learns more than content. The disciple emulates the teacher. He learns attitudes, thoughts, ideas, and whole ways of looking at things. He seeks to follow the teacher in His whole way of living, and the disciple considers it an honor if his life and experience can in some way mirror that of his teacher. “It is enough for the servant to be like his master.”

The early Christians wanted to walk in Jesus’ His way, to follow in His footsteps. After all He said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.” So they followed and called themselves “followers of the Way.”

The call continues age to age, and Jesus invites us. For the original 12 it was more than following along the dusty roads of Palestine. For them, as for us, it is the path of the soul, the path of discipleship. So the verses in the Psalm talk about the “Way,” the “path” – and this is about discipleship: “Discipleship in Your precepts,” “Discipleship of faithfulness,” and “Discipleship to Your commandments.”

We have learned part of that in our catechism: In the explanations of the Commandments, “Fear love and trust in God above all things.” (1st) “Call upon [His name] in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.” (2nd) “Help and befriend [our neighbor] in every bodily need.” (5th) “Lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and love and honor [our] spouse.” (6th) “Defend [our neighbor], speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.” (7th) It is the path of discipleship because it is the walk of faith – holding to the words and promises of God. And it is the path of discipleship because it is the way of faith that Jesus taught. And it is the way of

faith that Jesus taught because it is His way and His walk. “Morning by morning ... He awakens My ear to hear as those who are taught,” and “that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.” (Isaiah 50:4)

So one day Pastor Ralph Laufer and I were talking about the place in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life . . .” (Matthew 6:25-34) And we were looking at the Greek word in verse 30 that is usually translated, “oh you of little faith.” And he said, “Is this a diminutive?” The question and what he said after that completely changed how I have looked at that verse.

In some languages there are forms of words called diminutives. It is often found in an ending or a special form of an ordinary word. It changes the meaning to “little” or “small” something. They are actually expressions of endearment. For example, in German a child is “kind” (short i) but a “kindlein” is not only a little child but a dear little child. In German when you see “—lein” or “—chen” it might be a diminutive and a word of affection. In Spanish the endings are “-ita” or “-ito.”

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “If God so clothes the grass ... will He not much more clothe you *oligopistoi* ?” We usually read it as “oh you of little faith.” But what if it actually means “little-faith-ones” and what if it is a term of affection? Does it mean “Will He not much more clothe you oh little-faith-ones?” – and Jesus says it with tenderness and affection.

The same word comes around again in Matthew 8, when the disciples were out on the lake in the boat and the wind and waves were getting to be too much. They went and woke Jesus and said, “Lord save us! We’re going to die!” Jesus got up and, before He spoke and stilled the storm, He said to them, “Why are you afraid, little-faith-ones?” Again in Matthew 14 when Peter is coming to Jesus walking on the water and looks around and begins to worry (and sink); Jesus reached out, took him by the hand and said, “Oh little-faith-one, why did you doubt?”

These verses are where the disciples are learning, taking their first little steps in the walk of faith that Jesus is teaching. They are tiny steps (yes, even when Peter got out of the boat and walked on water it was a tiny step!); and Jesus patiently teaches. He is the One who is perfect in faith, and He is the Author and Perfector of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

There would be a day when Jesus would show them the full measure of faith. That was the day when He prayed praying from the cross in the terrible darkness of that day. They are words of faith when He says, “Father ...” and “My God, My God ...” Out of His acts of perfect faith comes our salvation.

It is not only a salvation from – from condemnation and being lost. It is also a salvation into – into a restored relationship and complete peace with God; into eternal life and sharing in all the blessings and goodness of the things of God.

We find ourselves drawn, attracted and pulled to the walk of faith, and even as we struggle to take our little steps, we have Jesus our teacher to guide us and help us learn how sweet it is to walk in the words and promises of God.

There are times when “the way” or “the path of discipleship” surfaces in popular Christian culture. Some years ago it was very popular to wear bracelets with the initials WWJD. It was good to think about and meditate on the path and the walk following Jesus. And many took their beginning little steps of discipleship; following Jesus and filling their thoughts and hearts with the pattern of learning about His ways, His desires, His way of seeing the world, and His plans for eternity. We struggle in that walk (we always do) and Jesus our teacher continues (He always does) to teach us about faith and the promises of God.

“Oligopistoi” – that’s us! Little-faith-ones, taking our baby steps of faith, and sometimes looking like we are not making much progress. That’s the struggle here. But we have a teacher, who walks with us and gently teaches us step by step what it means to walk in faith. And one day He will bring us into His presence, with faith perfected and no wavering from holding to the words and promises of God.

And so we treasure His precepts, His works, His word, His testimonies, His commandments, and every place and every part of what He does in our lives. Devotedly we cling to what Jesus gives (v. 31); and anything that distracts, or tricks, or leads us away from Him we want that as far as possible from us (v. 29).

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You call me to follow. Help me each day to learn from You, to fill my thoughts with Your words, to take the little steps in the walk of faith and each day to learn a little more of that walk. Teach me the promises of God, and about all that is waiting for all who know You; so I may begin and grow in walking in Your ways now in this life. Guide my prayers and lead my heart. I ask You for these things because You are my Teacher and You are my friend for all eternity. Amen.

ה – HE

- ³³ Explain to me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
- ³⁴ Educate me, that I may keep Your Law^{Torah}
and observe it with my whole heart.
- ³⁵ Enlighten me in the path of Your commandments,
for in it I delight.
- ³⁶ Endear my heart to Your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain.

ה – (HE-pronounced ‘hey’) – Part 1

Verses 33-36 “Enlighten me ... Endear my heart,” the prayer of the disciple

Explain, educate, enlighten, endear – these are the verbs that begin the first four verses of this letter. They are a call and they are a prayer. The fourfold repetition expresses the deep desire of the disciple for the things of the teacher: “the way of Your statutes,” “Your Torah^{Law},” “the path of Your commandments,” “Your testimonies.” (Notice the back and forth pattern, that puts Torah^{Law} & testimonies together; and also the way / path of Your statutes / commandments.) The disciple deeply desires the teaching of the Teacher and the ways and path of the Teacher.

Devoted to the Teacher’s words and ways he seeks to learn more. This is the pattern of Deuteronomy 6 “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” This is Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians that “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened ... you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Ephesians 1:18-19). *Lord, may we grow in knowing You and knowing Your ways. Educate, explain, enlighten & endear – and we will treasure and hold on to Your words and ways to orient our heart and soul all through life.*

“Explain to me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes.” This is the way that God has said that the world should be. Think about Philippians 2:5-11, “Have this mind in yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus ... Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name”. Jesus Christ is the pattern for the future.

“Educate me, that I may keep Your Torah”. *Give me understanding of You, just simply who You Yourself are Lord God.* The sharp focus of the prayer is the disciple wanting to focus his whole heart on the revelation of God in His Word. There is no other way of discipleship. The Word of God is the revelation of God and it must be at the center if we are to grow in anything spiritual.

The disciple longs for enlightenment, which is a popular idea in our time – and badly misunderstood. People seek enlightenment, and they turn within, meditate on inner quietness,

empty their thoughts and seek a sense of “oneness with the all.” What the writer of the psalm wants is enlightenment in the path of God’s commandments – and there we need to go deeper than “do’s” and “don’ts”. These are the words of God and tell us what He desires and what He will one day finally command that the world should be. This is God’s perfect will of all that is truly good. And while the disciple knows that he is not able to live out God’s perfect will; and if he is measured in that way he will come up short and stand condemned; there is something more.

When the Perfect One has come along. And when that Perfect One has stood in our place. And when that Perfect One has kept every part of the statutes; and observed the whole Law with the whole heart; and walked with perfection the path of the Commandments. And when that Perfect One has stood under judgment and been condemned in our place –

Then there is nothing but sweetness in all the ways and Word of the LORD. Everything is grace, everything is free, and everything is the unexpected and wondrous love of God. In his moment of enlightenment, that the “righteousness of God” is very simply “what God has done in Jesus Christ to make us righteous,” Luther said, “I felt exactly as though I had been born again, and I believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors. I then went through the Holy Scriptures as far as I could recall them from memory, and I found in other parts the same sense”. (E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and his times, p. 280)

The Word and Testimonies of God continue to capture us. We find ourselves running through the Scriptures thrilled with finding out who God is as we meet Him in Jesus. The sweetness comes through vividly in v. 36, “Endear my heart to Your testimonies.” When God has so captured the heart, what is everything else? When God has given everything, what is there for me to grab for and cling to? There is no comparison. V. 36 says, “not to selfish gain.” Paul says: everything else is rubbish. Let it come, let it go; as long as God has decided to give me Himself. This is the path of the disciple.

But there is more. Deep within the words of these verses ...

It is also the path of the Great Disciple. Jesus is the one who walks the path of faith. He is the one who prays, “Explain, educate, enlighten, endear.” He is the one who treasures the words and promises of His Father. He learns all things from His Father. “The Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing.” (John 5:19) He begins with the pattern of hearing and treasuring the Word of God (Isaiah 50:4). “Morning by morning” His day began with the Word of God and prayer (Lord, explain, educate, enlighten & endear “that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”)

Sent into this world Jesus lived His life in worship and devotion to His Father. “The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing. ... As I hear, I judge, and ... I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent Me.” (John 5:20, 30) Years ago one of my teachers said, “Do not forget also that Jesus’ going to the cross was also an act of worship to His Father.” He learns through the silence in the Garden “Father, if it is possible ... yet not My will but Your will be done.” He learns, through suffering, to hold by faith to the words and promises, even in the face of the aloneness of the cross, “My God, My God, ...” He hungers for the words and

promises of God (“Educate!” “Enlighten!” “Endear!”) and He loves, adores, and praises His Father right in the middle of the judgment. (Psalm 22:22 “I will tell of Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You”.) He is “the Author and Perfector of our faith”. His training and walk as the Great Disciple is complete and He is perfected. (Hebrews 2:10) So He will bring many to glory.

Jesus, the Great Disciple, calls us. “Follow Me,” He says. And He teaches us Faith, the walk that is nothing else than “Believing the Words and Promises of God” treasuring them, growing in them, holding to them “no matter what,” and carrying them through our life and to our neighbor.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You call me to follow. Help me each day to learn from You, to fill my thoughts with Your words, to take the little steps in the walk of faith and each day to learn a little more of that walk. Teach me the promises of God, and about all that is waiting for all who know You; so I may begin and grow in walking in Your ways now in this life. Guide my prayers and lead my heart. I ask You for these things because You are my Teacher and You are my friend for all eternity. Amen.

I WAW

41 For me also, O LORD, let Your covenant mercies be shown,
Your salvation according to Your promise;

42 fittingly, then, I shall answer those who taunt me,
for I trust in Your word.

43 Forsake not my mouth, taking away the word of truth,
for I hope in Your ordinances.

44 Faithfully, then. I will keep Your law[†]
forever and ever.

45 Forth, then, shall I walk in liberty,
for I have sought Your precepts.

46 Freely I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings
and shall not be put to shame,

47 finding my delight in your commandments,
which I love.

48 For I also lift up my hands to Your commandments,
which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes.

Waw Meditation

“For Me Also”

41. For me also, O LORD, let Your covenant mercies be shown, Your salvation according to Your promise;

42. fittingly, then, I shall answer those who taunt me, for I trust in Your word.

I want to see the covenant mercies. The covenant mercies are God’s hand in my life. The disciple wants God’s hand, whatever that may bring, because it is only God’s hand in our life that gives meaning. It is only God’s covenant mercies that explain and sort the world. It is only God’s Word that makes sense of anything. With that we can answer those who taunt. Without them we are separated, and everything is by random, or worse.

Having just watched church, the covenant mercies come to me in Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and the Word of God. I need these because I live in a world where those are called lies and false

promises. So I hunger. I hunger for the meal. I thirst for the water. I need the Word to fill me again.

43. Forsake not my mouth, taking away the word of truth, for I hope in Your ordinances.

I am sent into this world, with the Word of Truth. An interesting confirmation lesson I have done is to talk about being breath brothers with Jesus. On Easter evening meeting with them, He breathed on them and said, peace be with you. I was told by a seminary professor who had travelled the world that in different cultures personal space is very different. In the West we think of personal space as about 18 inches. Closer than that becomes uncomfortable. In the Middle East personal space is about 6 inches. He said you would see a westerner and a Mideasterner marching down the street. One backing up, one going forward, as each seeks to correct the personal distance. In addition, he said they love their garlic. There is a thing with blessing in that in the Mideast you want to get close enough that you bathe the person in your breath. So, I would pick out a “volunteer - victim” and before doing this I would take a couple cloves of garlic and chew them up, no matter how hot, it would be worth it. Then we would act out this personal space. I would get in their face, six inches or less and speak to them. They would react by backing up to get to a safe distance. I would go in again, they would back up and I would back them down the hallway. Then I explained to them, Jesus did not stand at the other end of the room and breathe on His disciples. If it were to be done culturally accurately, He would get up close with each disciple, face to face, and say “receive the Holy Spirit” or “Holy Breath.” And with their eyes burning the students would acknowledge that yes, this was different than how they had normally perceived the text. You can think of Spock and say, “My voice is your voice now. My Breath is your breath. Now go and forgive sins.” That is a pretty cool image. It is the way we are sent into the world.

44. Faithfully, then. I will keep Your law[†] forever and ever.

45. Forth, then, shall I walk in liberty, for I have sought Your precepts.

With that I will hold on to the Torah which is not simply law. It is the whole testimony of God, the record of what He has done and how He has done the work of salvation. Of course, I will hold on to it, finding out how He has come so close to me. And so I walk in freedom. God’s precepts are His teaching about what is right and wrong, good and bad, life and death, whatever He treasures. These are the things he says are true.

46. Freely I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame,

And we get back to the word Testimonies, as in Acts 2 “We hear them declaring in our own language the Testimonies of God” His witness about Himself.

47. finding my delight in your commandments, which I love.

His commandments are not only the do and don’t do. They are the “Come on. Follow me. Come on. This is how I’m going to make you.” Which brings in the other meaning of “you shall” Not

you better do this or else, but rather you shall. It will happen. If you don't see it now, wait awhile. I will do it. I will make you like this. It is what I am doing with you, My people. "You will have no other gods, and you will not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain, and you will remember the Sabbath Day and share My day of rest." So the commandments, they will happen. And not one tiny little bit of it will be my doing. I will witness, in terms of I will see this happening. I will stand in awe of it, knowing that by myself it is totally impossible, I will witness to it. Telling others what God is doing. Recreating the whole world around the Name that is above every name. The illustration of this happening is in Revelation 21. Now the dwelling of God is with man. He will be their God and they will be His people. So God fulfills his Sabbath.

Picture the disciples after Easter running free with Jesus. The world looks on in amazement because it has never seen that freedom. And that is us as we continue to run free through the world, calling out the testimonies of God to those around us. Inviting people to know this amazing God who has done these amazing things. Inviting them to be a part of the fulfillment. Then it becomes an eternal celebration and running with Jesus. So we invite.

48. For I also lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes.

God's statutes are the sorting out of how everything shall be arranged. They are good. I love them and I want to meditate on them. They are how this good, good God says that the world shall be ordered. It begins with raising Jesus to the highest place and giving Him the name that is above every name. He is the One around whom God is remaking the entire creation. He establishes what is good and true and right. That starts with Jesus. He then orders the whole creation; accordingly, and brings me into it; and stretches out the eternal years ahead. And we will get to see it

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, my friend, You have called me from this world – a world of dust and destined to return to dust. You called me to follow You and in walking with You to see the mercies of God, to hear the promises of God, to know the full mercies and grace of God. Help me with my soul so apt to wander, to turn from things of dust to see the works of God and hear the eternal promises, that I may know the fullness of the promise. You can do this because You came to this world and faced the distraction and clamor of the things of dust. With Your Blood You bought my freedom. So help me, remind me of the eternal promises and speak Your Word into my soul I may focus my soul on You and be simply Your sheep. Call and remind me again and again that I may stay focused on you as a sheep looks for all things to the Shepherd. Amen.

Ṭ – ZAYIN

49 Guarantee to Your servant Your word,
in which You have made me hope.

50 Ground of comfort in my affliction is this,
that Your promise gives me life.

51 Godless men utterly deride me,
but from Your law† I will not turn away.

52 Going over Your ordinances from of old,
I take comfort, O LORD.

53 Galling indignation seizes me because of the wicked,
who forsake Your law. †

54 Glad songs for me Your statutes have been
in the house of my sojourning.

55 Grasping Your name in the night, O LORD, I remember
and keep Your law. †

56 Given to me has this been;
that I have observed Your precepts.

Meditation

“My Ground and Promise”

49 Guarantee to Your servant Your word,
in which You have made me hope.

That is the hope. If only I could see. If only everything could be visible, but we are told to walk by faith, not by sight. Hebrews 11 has the long list of those who walk by faith, longed to see, desired to see, if only seeing . . . One day we will, but now we are in this world. We look around and so much that we hope for we can't see. The Psalmist longs to see the covenant mercies become visible. When will I see You, Lord?

50 Ground of comfort in my affliction is this,
that Your promise gives me life.

It is a world of affliction; just the not seeing, because that is a type of separation. There is the promise. The promise gives life. The promise is our comfort. The promise is there in the affliction of this world. The book of Revelation looks at the entire body of believers finally gathered together at the end and says, "These are those that have come out of the great tribulation." (Revelation 7:13) So in our affliction, the thing that is there for us is the promise. It is our comfort as nothing else can be. We hold on and cling to, fill our souls with, breathe in and breathe out that promise, and it is our comfort in this world.

51 Godless men utterly deride me,
but from Your law† I will not turn away.

In this world of separation, it is not only the separation. We look around and we are the odd ones out. We are called names. We are made fun of. Christians in Rome were called atheists. "What's wrong with you? Just a pinch of incense." "Are you a fool?" "What you are hoping for is pie in the sky, by and by." "You're missing all the fun of this world." "You are making yourself the enemy of everyone." And on and on it goes. Utterly derided. "Where is the promise of His coming? Ha ha ha!"

52 Going over Your ordinances from of old,
I take comfort, O LORD.

But there are the ways of God, and the way He does and the way He will order the world. There is order. There is sanity. The promises still stand. Take a deep breath. Take some comfort. Slowly, step by step the promises are coming.

53 Galling indignation seizes me because of the wicked,
who forsake Your law. †

But look around again and you find that you are an alien in this world. Those who want to separate from God, walk out on God and His Word. They mock and have nothing to do with it. We know this is wrong. They hear something God has said, and they're determined to do exactly the opposite, just because He said it, no matter how evil that ends up being. It is anti-God and that is where they have ended up. We have some indignation, but we are in this world as Paul says, "as sheep to be slaughtered." (Romans 8:36) We are easily disposed of. We cry out to God, "Where is the promise?" and it comes along so very slowly, step by step, but it is coming. Wait for it. We will one day see it.

54 Glad songs for me Your statutes have been

in the house of my sojourning.

But there is a distant triumph song. It is like it has always been, the Word of God, His statutes, His teachings of what is right. We lift our ears to hear it. It's a distant song, but it speaks of God's triumphs to come, and there are the glad songs that we hope for.

55 Grasping Your name in the night, O LORD, I remember
and keep Your law. †

So in between the days, it is the Word of God, it is the Name of God that is our hope and we grab hold of it. In the quiet of the night. It is who He is. I am that I am. Yeshua, Savior. And at the end of Matthew, "I with you Am." (Matthew 28:20) He gives Himself to be our hope. When the light is gone, when all is silent, He is our promise and comfort, our song of joy, and our "I with you Am." Because what He gives is nothing less than Himself.

56 Given to me has this been;
that I have observed Your precepts.

Everything where we have followed God and lived in His Word has been given. I've accomplished none of it. Nothing. I simply have the promise. In the other translation of the commandments "You will . . ." So the disciple waits, as Jesus waited on the cross and prayed, "In the congregation, I will praise you. I will speak your name to my brothers." (Psalm 22:22)

Prayer

Lord Jesus how long - Your whole Church cries out. When will I/we see You face-to-face. All around us the world mocks. Let your promise be my/our comfort in tribulation. Since the days of Abel, we have looked for the day of seeing You. Let Your teachings be my/our song, apart and longing, but Your Word can be in our souls. Come quickly. Amen

**And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my Fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end.**

ן – HETH

- ⁵⁷ Hence therefore, O LORD my portion,
I bind myself to keep Your words.
- ⁵⁸ How I entreat Your favor with all my heart!
Be gracious to me according to Your promise.
- ⁵⁹ Heeding my way,
I turn my feet to Your testimonies.
- ⁶⁰ Hastening I do not delay
to keep Your commandments.
- ⁶¹ However the cords of the wicked may entangle me,
I will not forget Your law.[†]
- ⁶² Harkening at midnight I rise to praise You,
because of Your righteous ordinances.
- ⁶³ Holding to all who fear You, I am a companion
with those who keep Your precepts.
- ⁶⁴ Heavy with Your covenant mercies is the earth O LORD;
teach me Your statutes!

Meditation

“In-between”

- ⁶² Harkening at midnight I rise to praise You,
because of Your righteous ordinances.

The meditation begins with verse 62 “Harkening at midnight I rise to praise You.” That verse is pivotal. It connects this segment with the one before (Zayin) because it, like the one before, talks about the in-between. Between the days. So when the day is over, the lights are off and there is nothing but blackness. When the TV and radio are turned off, there is nothing but silence. When you wake in the night, what is there staring into the blackness?

There are seminarians that like to say, the Name of God is more real than any reality around you. Page 6 in Lutheran Worship, our blue hymnal, gives introductory thoughts on worship. It says, "What is most sure and certain is the Name of God." So there, in the middle of the night when you wake up and look around and there is nothing but blackness, and you listen for something and there is nothing but silence. What is still there is the Name of God that has been spoken and announced to the whole universe. "I am that I am" or various interpretations: the Self-existent one. The uncreated. The Eternal. Indeed the name of God is eternal, remaining unchanged from before the first dust of the world until . . . Until the last verse of Matthew when Jesus took the Name of God "I Am" and put two words in the middle "I with you Am." Then going on "all the days" in Greek *pasas tas hemeras* (πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας). He is the with you God when everything else falls away. And He is the with you God, all the days.

This is more personal than I usually write, but last December I suffered a stroke. It was weeks before I learned again to open my eyes, and He is the "With you God." There were days of frustration and inability to learn to sit straight, to talk, to begin to eat, and He is the "with you God. There have been long days of therapy, and some of it has been painful, and He is the With you God. The future is uncertain, with hopes and doubts and needs and fears, and He is the With you God. There have been a few times when I expressed my frustration and in venting and dumping it on her, nearly drove my wife out of her ever-lovin' mind with frustration, and He is the with you God. So I can take heart. He is the with you God who comes with His promises, with water and His Name, and with the Body and Blood of Calvary. He has taken the promise "with you" and put in the most eternal thing there is, in His own Name. "With you all the days until the fulfillment of the age."

Again, take heart. (Psalm 46:2) "Though the mountains give way, though the Earth be moved." Though all of reality collapses under our feet, and we fall out of this world with nothing of it left, He is still "I with you Am." His Name and His promise grab hold of us and hold us. In fact there is a certain sweetness in the middle of the night, when there is nothing else and we can turn and notice once again His name "I Am" and His name "I with you Am." And there is a promise in the very Name of God. It is a promise that through eternity He will keep hold of us. We can, so to speak, crawl into the Name of God, rest there and be safe and sleep. Because it's not just the thing He says, it is who He is.

So, hearkening . . . Hark! In the darkness, in the silence there is the Name of God. Praising Him within notice the very quiet and very still praise of God that He has made a part of us. It's appropriate that that one should finish with AMEN!

Prayer

And now what do I look for Oh God? What do I seek? You have given me new desires. "Turn my heart to your testimony." (v 36) "Lately when I see myself, I seem like someone else"1. What do I want? In the quiet of the night when everything is silent, in the darkness of the night when all the lights are shut off, in the quiet of my soul, when the day is done and I'm laying there alone, be with me. Let your Name be my anchor, holding me, Your promises, my comfort, Your teachings, my songs, because finally everything must return and give way. Be my one thing when everything else is broken and no more. Be for me my Eternal Friend. You make Yourself my Promise, as you speak Your Name, "I with you AM." As thus You say, in Your Name, AMEN. 2

1. Lyric from Jesus Christ Superstar from the song "I don't know how to love him" Mary Magdalene singing about her confusion.
2. *Sei meine eine Sache, wenn alles andere kaputt ist und nicht mehr. Sei für mich mein ewiger Freund. Du gibst dir mein Versprechen, während du deinen Namen sprichst, Amen.* Just slipped a gear and started working in German. No apologies.

U – TETH

65 In goodness You have dealt with your servant,
O LORD, according to your word.

66 Instill in me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.

67 Idly I went astray before I was afflicted,
but now I keep your word.

68 Impeccably good You are and You do good;
teach me your statutes.

69 Insolent ones smear me with lies,
but I with my whole heart keep your precepts.

70 Insensate like fat is their heart,
but I delight in your law.†

71 It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

72 Incomparably more precious to me is the law† from Your mouth
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

Meditation: “Five”

65 In goodness You have dealt with your servant,
O LORD, according to your word.

66 Instill in me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.

And so we are back to “deal kindly with your servant” which is fulfilled in a world where there is way too much dealing unkindly with each other, He deals kindly with us. It is also the desire to see and to experience that goodness and kindness. In the numerology of the Bible, five is the number of grace. This is in part because five is the number of the

senses. God will have, He is determined to have, us experience His goodness and His kindness. So the Means of Grace: in the Word of God we hear and we see printed on the page, in Baptism we feel the pouring of the water and hear the Name of God calling us, in the supper we taste the bread on our tongues, we smell the wine, we feel it being given, hear the words of Jesus and we see the elements as they come to us. It is not a coincidence or happenstance, or a random thing that the Means of Grace involve each of the five senses. It is the plan of God to fill our senses with the experience of His goodness.

Thank you, Sara. I was teaching eight grade religion going through the catechism. First is the Word, the raw Word. We hear it spoken as it is read. We see it as we look at the letters on the page. Then I began to explain baptism. You raised your hand and asked, "does that mean I can call baptism the wet word?" I set aside my notes for the day because suddenly there was a way to explain how the Means of Grace all hold together and are distinct. After awhile we started to call the Lord's supper the tasty word. The word, the wet word, the tasty word. We have the binding together that each is the Word coming to us in the world. We have the distinctness of each because each comes to us in a specific way. We have the raw Word that confronts me deep in my soul and calls me to know life. We have the wet word where God takes His word and His name, stirs them up in water and pours the whole thing over our head. We have the tasty Word where God lays out the finest meat, the wine of heaven, the sweetest of wines. We sing in the song, "Bread of heaven, bread of heaven" and it is about Jesus. We have God who will speak to the deepest part of me, who will pour His word and name over me and will feed me with Himself. It is incredibly intimate, with each one as it comes along taking another step of closeness to me and my soul.

And all of this is first promised in its entirety and then fulfilled day after day.

The Psalmist turns to praying for more of the Word of God, His commandments that instill knowledge and judgment.

67 Idly I went astray before I was afflicted,
but now I keep your word.

The third verse tells the experience of taking for granted what we have, wondering away from it and then learning how good that goodness is. Learning to treasure God's Word.

68 Impeccably good You are and You do good;
teach me your statutes.

And what is the measure of that goodness? Impeccably good down to the least, the tiniest iota (or alternately jot and tiddle. The Hebrew text has tiddle. The Hebrew text has markings between for how long of a breath you should take when reading it out loud. Yes, the Masoretes put that much detail into their little markings. Dr. Horace Hummel taught us some of those details.) of the words and of the acts of God. Fully and without fail He is good. Fully and without fail His goodness is given. So I will have, must have, need down to the deepest part of me to have, the Word and goodness of God.

And so comes the back and forth, back and forth, in this world and in relationship to God.

69 Insolent ones smear me with lies,
but I with my whole heart keep your precepts.

70 Insensate like fat is their heart,
but I delight in your law.†

Christian after Christian knows the experience of being smeared with lies and the calming truth of the Word of God. Where else shall we turn in this world?

The heart turned away from God becomes dull and unable to sense and experience His goodness. Insensate like fat is their heart, but I will delight in Your Law. Remember that Torah means the acts of God, beginning in Genesis, beginning with creating and continuing on to the work of salvation.

71 It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

72 Incomparably more precious to me is the law† from Your mouth,
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

So the Psalmist says the experience of affliction was good because it calls the soul and drives the heart to see the goodness of God. Solzhenitsyn says after his experience at the prison camps, "Thank you gulag, because I would not have known the goodness of God." So he, together with the Psalmist, and we too are able to turn curses into blessings as long as we use them to drive us to God.

And we would not trade the treasuring of the word of God for anything, for any amount of riches.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of salvation, my soul's Great Friend. You have redeemed me so that I can share Your promises and live in the light of Your Word. If I wander, call me again and again by Your Spirit, so that on that day I can see You face-to-face and sing Your praise. As You sing and exalt over Your Church, I will sing and exalt in You my Savior, whether or not I sing in tune. I will sing with all my heart, so my heart will love, and my lips will sing. Amen

1 – YODH

- ⁷³ Joined by Your hands I am made and fashioned –
give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.
- ⁷⁴ Joyfully they who fear You will rejoice when they see me;
because I have hoped in Your word.
- ⁷⁵ Judgments of Yours, O LORD; I know are right;
and that in faithful care You have afflicted me.
- ⁷⁶ Justifying mercies of Your covenant, send to comfort me;
according to Your promise to Your servant.
- ⁷⁷ Judge that Your mercy may come – that I may live;
for Your law[†] is my delight.
- ⁷⁸ Justly put to shame the insolent; for with guile they have lied about me;
but as for me I will meditate on Your precepts.
- ⁷⁹ Justified ones who fear You; let them turn to me;
that they may know Your testimonies.
- ⁸⁰ Judge my heart blameless regarding Your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame.

Meditation

“Joined by Your Hand”

- ⁷³ Joined by Your hands I am made and fashioned –
give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.
- ⁷⁴ Joyfully they who fear You will rejoice when they see me;
because I have hoped in Your word.

Joined by Your Hand. The text of God’s Trombones, the Creation Poem
(<https://poets.org/poem/creation>) says,

Up from the bed of the river God scooped the clay; And by the bank of the river He
kneeled him down; And there the great God Almighty Who lit the sun and fixed it in
the sky, Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night, Who rounded the
earth in the middle of his hand; This great God, Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust Toiling over a lump of clay Till he shaped it in his own
image;
Then into it he blew the breath of life, And man became a living soul.

Joined by Your Hand. The rest of verse one says, "I am made and fashioned." To know this is intimate and personal, gives wisdom and understanding.

As I also have joyfulness to see others who know this same truth. There is a brotherhood and kinship among those who know their creation.

⁷⁵ Judgments of Yours, O LORD; I know are right;
and that in faithful care You have afflicted me.

So much in this life is a judgment call. We have an unending set of choices that we do not know what will be the result. Will it be good or bad? Will it bless and benefit those around us? Our choices miscarry, and that is in part the problem with much of government. Those who rise to power through their own efforts and those who are elected both, begin to believe that they know what is best for others. The king does not, the tyrant does not, the noble, the aristocrat, the elite do not. One of the problems with kings is that they think they know. Part of that thought is of their own making. Part of that thought is thrust upon them by those over whom they rule who expect them to be wiser than they can be. The ruler thinks he knows and so he decides and those under him get to live with the consequences. The book of Judges speaks in part of freedom when it says "There was no king in Israel in those days. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." This does not only speak of chaos, it also speaks of freedom. Do you wish to raise livestock and plant corn? Will you dig clay out of the ground and purchase a pottery wheel and become the potter? Will you build walls and houses? Will you sculpt? In First Samuel God warned the people what would happen if they got their way and got a king. They found a whole lot to regret.

But there is One who does know, Who sees the potential. Who not only sees in the heart and knows our deeds, Who also sees our potential, our ability, our skills and our temperament. Who knows what the outcome will be. Who is able to faithfully judge and determine and make those calls of what our life will be. To have Him as the one who guides our life is a good and wonderful thing. If He sends some affliction it will be for my good. He said and promised it. I am blind. The king is blind. The rulers are blind. He is faithful. So the last line of verse seventy-five says that I know your judgments are true, and if I have faced affliction, that also you have guided so that I may be trained and grow in your ways. This is a confession of faith that requires a good deal of experience.

⁷⁶ Justifying mercies of Your covenant, send to comfort me;
according to Your promise to Your servant.

So the covenant relationship leads to mercies that come at exactly the right time. And the mercies are given, amazingly, to make me stand before God as one who is justified in His eyes. This is completely undeserved. It is also completely astonishing. Not only does it come from justifying mercies, justifying mercies come from Him Who takes my place and stands under God's judgement. Bob Roll in covering the Tour de France talks about riders investing in their "pain bank", so that when the time comes they can draw on that account and move beyond what they thought was their limit. The Christian in this world has an "affliction bank" where we face the common afflictions and the afflictions specifically directed at Christians. We learn from the faithfulness of God to understand beyond what we thought might be our limit. We are walking with Him!

⁷⁷ Judge that Your mercy may come – that I may live;
for Your law⁺ is my delight.

God judges and determines the balance and patterns of our life. As he does so he sends his various mercies at exactly the right time. We are surprised and find out time and time again how good He is, and how He knows exactly what we need when we need it. So I may think more and more of this: the joy of walking with Him and facing down everything that I go through.

⁷⁸ Justly put to shame the insolent; for with guile they have lied about me;
but as for me I will meditate on Your precepts.

⁷⁹ Justified ones who fear You; let them turn to me;
that they may know Your testimonies.

Insolent is exactly the right term for those who take a stand against Christians because the Christians are holding to God and His Word. But God will faithfully judge and is our hope. Astonishing is it not that the enemies that turn on us, it is also their judgment that His Son Jesus carried, and that there are many whom He will lead through affliction and His faithful judgment to a knowledge of salvation.

So the experience of affliction in our walk with God becomes a witness that others may see and be encouraged. That others may see and be given hope. There's a military saying, "It's not so much that I mind dying. I just don't want my death to be wasted." Precious in the sight of the Lord is the affliction of His saints. Our faithful God makes everything you face count in the gathering of His kingdom. SDG

⁸⁰ Judge my heart blameless regarding Your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame.

In view of the faithfulness of God's Son. Only connected to Him. Only because He has called me friend and brother. Only then can I have any hope and innocence in God's eyes.

Prayer:

Judge me in view of the faithfulness of Your Son. So Oh Lord, my true and wondrous Friend, let me walk closely by Your side. Then the journey is joy, and afflictions and blessings are the scenery shared. Amen

7 – KAPH

- ⁸¹ Keeping watch for Your salvation, my soul longs,
yet I hope in Your word.
- ⁸² Keeping watch for Your promise, my eyes long.
I ask, “When will You comfort me?”
- ⁸³ Kept like a wineskin in smoke, I waste away,
yet I have not forgotten Your statutes.
- ⁸⁴ Know the days of Your servant! How long?
When will You bring my persecutors to judgment?
- ⁸⁵ Knaves have dug pitfalls for me;
openly contemptuous of Your law.[†]
- ⁸⁶ Keystones of truth; Your commandments all endure;
but I am persecuted with falsehood; help me!
- ⁸⁷ Killing me they sought, and almost wiped me from the earth.
But I have not forsaken Your precepts.
- ⁸⁸ Keep me in Your covenant mercies and give me life.
So I also may keep the testimonies of Your mouth.

Meditation:

“Going Back”

This is how Kaph ends:

- ⁸⁸ Keep me in Your covenant mercies and give me life.
So I also may keep the testimonies of Your mouth.

It is an interesting connection. The covenant mercies are what we are given in Jesus, so I may keep Your testimonies. Years ago, I informally was talking about another section of the Psalm with another pastor and said it is like going back to where you grew up, all the places that have meaning and experiences connected with them.

Once again being able to walk through the place of your youth, and as you do so you find that everything is as it was. So, as you walk through you remember.

That’s what the phrase “keeping your testimonies” suggests to me, that we are going back, remembering the acts of God, finding out that it is still as He did it, it is completely preserved. It is like walking with Him through all those memories and finding that they still hold: the first garden. The hopes, the dreams, the disappointments, the promises.

So we go through the other verses:

⁸¹ Keeping watch for Your salvation, my soul longs,
yet I hope in Your word.

⁸² Keeping watch for Your promise, my eyes long.
I ask, "When will You comfort me?"

Once again we are waiting for God's salvation, as the people of the Old Testament waiting for the plan of salvation to be carried out. We wait for the appearance of salvation.

And so it is. God's promises hold all of the hopes, all of the glorious future. We long for those promises. (By the way, many years ago a book was published called the Jesus Person Pocket Promise Book, being simply a gathering of promises from scripture. It is an encouraging book to open and look through a few pages.)

⁸³ Kept like a wineskin in smoke, I waste away,
yet I have not forgotten Your statutes.

That there is an interesting image, "like a wineskin in smoke." Hold to the promises and hope, and yet the separation and contrariness of this world does wear you down. When will I see You, Your promises, Your glory, the hope that You bring?

⁸⁴ Know the days of Your servant! How long?
When will You bring my persecutors to judgment?

It is interesting that it is not a statement "You know the days of Your servant" but a prayer and an appeal. "Know the days of Your servant!" It is more than know the number of them, and is knowing the various days that we have. As Jesus said at the end of Matthew, "I am with you all the days" - blessing, affliction, waiting, quiet, confused, etc., etc. He knows them intimately because He walks with us through them. And in the in-between, His statutes are songs in the night. His promises are comfort, in the quiet times. His Word is my connection to life and He is my soul's great Friend.

⁸⁵ Knaves have dug pitfalls for me;
openly contemptuous of Your law.[†]

There is hazard, danger and peril in this world. There are hazards, dangers, traps and things to trip that I am not aware of, even most of them. I will stumble. I will sin. The enemy will gloat. But there, unseen surrounding me, are the covenant mercies,

everything that is promised in Christ. There are plenty who celebrate when a Christian stumbles and fails in life. First among them being the devil. Remember and know it thoroughly, how much the sheep needs the Shepherd. (Frankly, the sheep doesn't know how much the sheep needs the shepherd, rather the shepherd knows how much the sheep needs Him. We are heading back toward the phrase, covenant mercies.)

⁸⁶ Keystones of truth; Your commandments all endure;
but I am persecuted with falsehood; help me!

Keystones are very important parts of the building. They are set in place to hold the building together. God has set out His commandments as truth that holds the universe together. Keystones of truth, Your commandments all endure.

These are the truths on which we can arrange and orient our lives. Daily we fall short and daily we are forgiven. If we keep His commandments we are persecuted, so the cry of the psalmist, very simple cry, "help me!"

⁸⁷ Killing me they sought, and almost wiped me from the earth.
But I have not forsaken Your precepts.

How bad can the persecution get? "Why doesn't he just leave? Why doesn't he just die?" We are in the way. We are standing in the way of where the rebellious want to take everything in this world.

⁸⁸ Keep me in Your covenant mercies and give me life.
So I also may keep the testimonies of Your mouth.

Prayer:

I pray for covenant mercies, not because I want mercy. It is because I want God, and the only place where I can find Him is in the One Who forms the covenant in Himself, in His own flesh, in His own blood, in His own resurrection and promise. And so the prayer is so often in scripture, not for the gift, but for the Giver. If You then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will He give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him, says Jesus. So Sunday after Sunday He calls us, not just to hear His Word, but to receive Him. In love He stoops down to feed us. To place His Body on our tongue. to give us His Blood to drink.

So Lord, walk with me that I may walk with You. Be Yourself to me, my soul's Great Friend, my Brother, my Friend who calls me, "come walking." "Come have breakfast." "Come up here to be with Me and see My Glory." How close. How intimate. How

tender. How do I not respond, "Praise You Lord." How do I not sing Your praises? How do I not turn to You in the quiet of the night? And this closeness of me the sheep and You the Shepherd is the path of discipleship. Once again, how sweet.

Amen

ל – LAMEDH

- ⁸⁹ Long as eternity, O LORD,
Your word stands firm in the heavens.
- ⁹⁰ Legacy of Your faithfulness generation to generation;
You have established the earth and it stands fast.
- ⁹¹ Laid by Your ordinance they stand this day,
for all things are Your servants.
- ⁹² 'Less Your law[†] had been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
- ⁹³ Loath am I to forget Your precepts,
for by them You have given me life.
- ⁹⁴ Liberate me; I am Yours;
for Your precepts I have sought!
- ⁹⁵ Lying in wait to destroy me are the wicked;
but I diligently consider Your testimonies.
- ⁹⁶ Limit to all perfection I have seen,
but Your commandment opens out beyond measure.

Meditation:

“Long as Eternity”

- ⁸⁹ Long as eternity, O LORD,
Your word stands firm in the heavens.

One Sunday I asked, if God puts His eternal Word in you, what does that make you? Before I could take a breath to go on, one confirmand called out, “Eternal.” Way to learn the implications!

- ⁹⁰ Legacy of Your faithfulness generation to generation;
You have established the earth and it stands fast.
- ⁹¹ Laid by Your ordinance they stand this day,
for all things are Your servants.

That is the measure, that is the legacy, that is the faithfulness. So that is the measure of what God does for us.

Ordinance is what God says is right and wrong, how His creation is ordered. The entire creation is thick with God’s will and command that we should be kept and preserved and served as His people and His children.

⁹² 'Less Your law[†] had been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.

So God's Law, so God's Torah, is the whole record of His blessing and keeping. It is in part that Law is His blessing "The Lord look upon you with delight, and give you peace." (Aaronic Benediction) So that blessing comes to us and we stand in the delight of the Lord, and it becomes a delight to belong and be His. With Him and His blessing we are preserved. To repeat, all that blessing becomes ours as He puts His eternal Word in our souls. It sees us through this world, its difficulties and affliction, and into the eternal blessings He has planned.

⁹³ Loath am I to forget Your precepts,
for by them You have given me life.

⁹⁴ Liberate me; I am Yours;
for Your precepts I have sought!

Loath am I, why would I ever want to forget His precepts? All and everything He gives and speaks comes with blessings, too many to count. Even during our affliction, He pours them out. How do I measure them? I cannot.

Liberate me means take away the limitations. It is not by running off, but by running to the center of the relationship that I find the eternal freedom.

⁹⁵ Lying in wait to destroy me are the wicked;
but I diligently consider Your testimonies.

The wicked can lie in wait, and will have to lie in wait a long, long time, because I have the eternal Word and the eternal One.

⁹⁶ Limit to all perfection I have seen,
but Your commandment opens out beyond measure.

Even the perfectly sinless angels are limited. The scientist with his perfect formula is limited. The mathematician uses the symbol infinity (∞) that is limited. But God's Word, His command, is not.

Commandment, not commandments. Interesting. There is a chief head and great commandment. It says love, and speaks of relationship. The first of the ten says "I Am

the Lord your God Who brought you out.” The commandments will start with the commandment and speak first of God’s doing and in God’s doing there is an eternal infinity that expands out forever. It carries and brings and gives to us the blessing “eternal.”

And so, to sum up all our lives, we are “in relationship.”

Prayer

Lord God, Who is eternal; Whose Word is eternal; Whose commandment is eternal; Who has placed eternity in my soul. I thank You. You have spoken Your truth into me and in that way have transformed me. What is there to go back to? Why would I forsake the wondrous newness and reality You have given? Let me hold Your Word and know that Your Word is my treasure. You began Your speaking to Israel “I Am.” You finish Your Gospel by saying, “I with you Am.” To have You is eternal life and forever.

Amen

□ – MEM

- ⁹⁷ Mightily I love Your law[†]
It is my meditation all the day.
- ⁹⁸ Much wiser than my enemies Your commandment makes me,
for it is ever with me.
- ⁹⁹ More understanding I have than all my teachers,
for Your testimonies are my meditation.
- ¹⁰⁰ More than the aged I understand,
for I keep Your precepts.
- ¹⁰¹ My feet I hold back from every evil way,
in order to keep Your word.
- ¹⁰² Meander from Your ordinances, I will not,
for You have taught me.
- ¹⁰³ Magnificently sweet are Your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth.
- ¹⁰⁴ Mentored by Your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

Meditation

“Mighty Love”

- ⁹⁷ Mightily I love Your law[†]
It is my meditation all the day.

This is a love song from One Whom the world calls a fool. From it I learn the question, “Where shall I focus my love?” The answer is mightily, passionately, God and His Word, all through my being. The reason why is He calls and He is pursuing me, inviting me tenderly; and then passionately at the hill called Calvary.

- ⁹⁸ Much wiser than my enemies Your commandment makes me,
for it is ever with me.

Out of His Words, commandments, etc. comes wisdom, and that wisdom guides me. A question to ponder: do I want to follow His commands because He is powerful and He is able to enforce what He says is right, or does He have it absolutely right?, what is good and true? I find the second option deeply attractive. To say it in brief, He has convinced me. He has persuaded and won my heart and soul.

What that means is in reading His Word and listening to His teachings and the words of Jesus and the way He lived and walked among us, there is none like Him. He is the most

fascinating person who has ever walked this earth. I look at His words and I find it absolutely convincing that what He says is the truth, the most wonderful body of teaching ever. He did not conform to the standards of His day, nor did He simply react to them. Instead He brings a truth that is in the best sense of the word transcendent. That is over arching, amazing and worth pondering day after day; beyond anything that comes from this human race. It is the stuff that comes from God, in part beyond my understanding, but all the way through calling to me; saying to me as was said to the apostle John, "come up here." It begins to open up and reveal Heaven itself and the heart of God.

Like Mary I want to sit at His feet. Like Mary Magdalene I want to call him "Rabboni, My Teacher." Our nation's Declaration of Independence says "We hold these truths to be self-evident." As Christians we hold the word of scripture to be self-verifying. It brings the proof of its own truth. This from our God, Who does not approach us simply with power, might and commanding, but rather stoops down to walk among us and lifts us up to carry us, past the judgment and into the blessing. What else shall I do. I cannot turn aside.

⁹⁹ More understanding I have than all my teachers,
for Your testimonies are my meditation.

In that Word for whoever reads it, learns it and meditates on it, there is more wisdom than all the rest of the teachers, teachings and information in this world of information. Again, our country was blessed by hundreds of thousands of families in log homes where the Bible was brought out daily, read and talked about. That's where our greatest, including Lincoln, came from to be a blessing for us as a people.

¹⁰⁰ More than the aged I understand,
for I keep Your precepts.

More is there for me in the Word of God and meditating on it than all the years of long life experience. That's why the Bible gathers its wisdom: both in the pattern of proverbs and the wisdom of generations - passed down, collected and meditated on; and some of the brief sayings of Jesus. "I am the Way, Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through me." (John 14:3 ff) and "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." (John 3:16) and "Greater love has no man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends. You are My friends." (John 15:13) and "Because I live, you will live." (John 14:19)

So it comes to us. On the one hand in many and various ways; and on the other hand from the One who sat with Nicodemus and the woman at the well. Who called the man born blind and said, "I am the good Shepherd." Who gave a promise to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Who called Mary Magdalene out of her deep sorrow in which she was lost with the simple speaking of her name, and told Thomas to put a finger in the print of the nail.

¹⁰¹ My feet I hold back from every evil way,
in order to keep Your word.

As Luther said, "The church is nothing else than sheep that know the voice of their Shepherd."

¹⁰² Meander from Your ordinances, I will not,
for You have taught me.

Again, sheep that know the voice of their Shepherd, "and when He calls He leads them out, and they follow because they know His voice." (John 10:4) It gets all the way down to the detail of the prayer He brought us from heaven. Deep in the eternity of before. The relationship was there, Father to Son. And he is the One Who has that relationship by the nature of Who He is. When He comes into this world, He brings the relationship and teaches His church, pray in this way, "Father . . ." We hear His words and go toddling after Him, "Our Father Who art in heaven." So in the life of the church, the Lord's Prayer begins as not a prayer. It begins as the Word of God coming to us and inviting us to follow. In the following it is a prayer. It starts as quite the opposite of prayer, that goes from earth to heaven. It comes from heaven to earth. So this my Shepherd teaches, leads and guides me, "wandering sheep that I am" (Psalm 119:176, the last verse of the Psalm.)

¹⁰³ Magnificently sweet are Your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth.

The analogy really doesn't need any comment. It is used in Psalm 19. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your eyes, Oh Lord our Maker and Redeemer." (Ps 19:14) Many pastors start their sermon quoting Psalm 19.

¹⁰⁴ Mentored by Your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

Precepts are wisdom sayings. I spoke a precept to our grandkids awhile ago, for whom money was “Oh, I got \$5. How fast can I spend it.” The precept was, the money you don’t spend becomes power. I wonder how much that will help since fathers are those you don’t listen to, and I am their father’s father. In math a square of a negative number becomes a positive, but I really don’t sound like I have too much hope on this one, do I? Precepts are truths that you learn and internalize that guide your life. So may I “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” the precepts.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You came into this world to sit and talk by a well and late at night with a rabbi. You came to call rabbis, pharisees, soldiers, lepers, and even so extreme as to invite the one who said he would not believe to put his finger in the nail mark and share in life. You called me to walk away from myself and follow You. I too want to share in your outrageous and wondrous victory. You plant Your Word into my soul. Grant that I may read, mark, learn and inwardly digest Your Word so that it may permeate my entire soul, and I may find myself made different and new and come into the joy and life that you bring. Amen

נ – NUN

- ¹⁰⁵ Now is Your word a lamp for my feet;
and a light to my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ Noble the oath I have sworn; and confirmed –
to observe the ordinances of Your righteousness.
- ¹⁰⁷ Noisomely afflicted I am,
Give me life, O LORD, according to Your word!
- ¹⁰⁸ Nod with favor, O LORD, over the offerings of my mouth,
and teach me Your ordinances.
- ¹⁰⁹ Nonstop, my life is at risk,
but I do not forget Your law.[†]
- ¹¹⁰ Nets for me the wicked have laid,
but I do not stray from Your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Noble heritage forever are Your testimonies to me,
yes, they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² Noting Your statutes, I humble my heart to perform them;
forever, to the end.

Meditation:

“Now”

- ¹⁰⁵ Now is Your word a lamp for my feet;
and a light to my path.

The standard translation is “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.” I used the word “Now” at the beginning partly to preserve the alphabet poem layout of the psalm, but it is also an excellent way of looking back over all that has been said so far in the Psalm. Actually that is not a bad idea. Having thirteen letters previous, there is plenty of reflection on God’s work, His precepts, His ways, His words, His Torah, His testimonies, His statues, His ordinances, and bringing all of that together, the word “now.” It acts as a summary word of all of those. Of the Lord’s Torah and testimony. It sets us continuing on the study of discipleship. Now reflecting back over a little more than half the Psalm, “now” is Your word a lamp for my feet and a light to my path. It is well proven in all kinds of situations.

- ¹⁰⁶ Noble the oath I have sworn; and confirmed –
to observe the ordinances of Your righteousness.

It is not as if I can lead the perfect life, or the life upright in every (any) day and hour. But, I do desire His Word, His ways and Him. He calls the Christian and enables the life.

As many as the failings and stumblings, it is what Paul called “the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phillipians 3:14)

¹⁰⁷ Noisomely afflicted I am,
Give me life, O LORD, according to Your word!

Off-hand guess, that the word “noisomely” is thoroughly archaic. The meaning is: bothersome and irritating to the entire person, especially as it impacts on the senses and especially the sense of smell. We have grief in this world where we are confronted by opposition to the Word of God by the devil’s snares and temptations and by our traitorous and sinful old nature. “I have met the enemy and he is me.” (paraphrase of an old Pogo comic strip which read, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”) Modern phrasing, “I am my own evil twin.”

¹⁰⁸ Nod with favor, O LORD, over the offerings of my mouth,
and teach me Your ordinances.

So I have nothing to bring that can be of any worth in the sight of God. Reaching the middle of this section is the prayer “Nod with favor.” It is a prayer for favor that I have not earned and do not deserve. I cannot have this favor without God’s approval which He gives in Jesus Christ. Nodding in His acceptance of the sacrifice in my place. To have this favor is a gift, and it is a priceless gift. Pause my soul in wonder at the unearned and undeserved surprise. Continue on with the knowledge that the entire path is one of complete and total Grace, given to every step.

¹⁰⁹ Nonstop, my life is at risk,
but I do not forget Your law.[†]

¹¹⁰ Nets for me the wicked have laid,
but I do not stray from Your precepts.

So I am walking the path of grace in a world that is against God. It could end any second, any moment, but I walk it knowing that God has nodded. He has made His decision to favor and bless. So I face the uncertainty wrapped in the coziest, most comfortable warmth of His grace, mercy and companionship. Sometimes the sheep must walk, not seeing the Shepherd but simply trusting that He knows, He is present simply to guard and guide. That is part of discipleship and part of the walk of faith.

So asked which is more important, is it more important to be cautious and aware of nets and traps and pitfalls? Absolutely not! It is more important to focus on His word and

precepts, wisdom and way. There are those who try to make their way in the world by figuring out what the enemy, the devil is doing. It is a much the wiser course to stay close to God and keep your eyes on Him. Accept the privilege of simply walking with Him and let Him take care of the other things. Be the happy sheep, and let Him be the fierce Shepherd and defender.

¹¹¹ Noble heritage forever are Your testimonies to me,
yes, they are the joy of my heart.

We return to one of my favorite terms, “testimonies.” These are God’s witness of His doing creation and salvation - of His attitude and desire for my being. Those testimonies are eternal, and in them being eternal they give eternity to me. I guess I know where to focus my eyes. It’s not a hard choice when you know of His grace.

¹¹² Noting Your statutes, I humble my heart to perform them;
forever, to the end.

So a good humbling comes along. If you know His ways and statutes, then bow the head and devote yourself to them. And one note to be precise, when this section says “to the end” it means the end in this world. The walk continues. There is no final end, because He has in mind eternity.

Prayer:

You spoke the world into being. You spoke the whole creation into being, and yet the world hangs suspended, and lies separated from seeing heaven, angels and eternity. How shall God come to me in my separation? The answer resounds, His Word! Plant Your Word deep in my soul Oh God. Bless me that I may read, mark learn and inwardly digest Your Word that it may permeate my entire being. That in my walk in this world I may be guided and kept by Your Word and Your being. There are times in this world where a sheep must walk the path without seeing or awareness of the things of heaven, but simply knowing that the Shepherd is close and does guard, keep and guide. Watch over, protect and guide me on the walk of discipleship and faith. (Hebrews 11) You are here. Thank you that it does not depend on me, or I would be lost. Thank You that it does not depend on my faith, or I would fail. Thank you that it does not depend upon my living up to or holding on to your precepts, commandments, ordinances or statutes, or I would be condemned. Thank you that it is all on Your shoulders, author and perfecter of faith.

Occasionally when I hear or read the parable of the Good Shepherd, I wonder what does a wet sheep smell like? Yet You carry me joyfully and call Your angels to rejoice. Amen

ו – SAMECH

- ¹¹³ Outraged am I with the double-minded;
but Your law[†] I love.
- ¹¹⁴ Over me as a shield and hiding place You are;
I hope in Your word.
- ¹¹⁵ Out! Away from me you evil-doers;
that I may keep the commandments of my God!
- ¹¹⁶ On Your promise establish me, that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!
- ¹¹⁷ Oh, sustain me, that I may be safe,
and devote myself to Your statutes continually!
- ¹¹⁸ Off You cast all who go astray from Your statutes;
truly their cunning is in vain.
- ¹¹⁹ Out, like dross You discard all the wicked of the earth;
therefore, I treasure Your testimonies.
- ¹²⁰ Overwhelmed is my flesh with awe of You;
and Your judgments I revere.

Meditation:

“Separated”

- ¹¹³ Outraged am I with the double-minded;
but Your law[†] I love.

The popular and the leaders seem determined to get as far from God as possible. And because God is the giver of life, they are racing as fast as they can toward death. Racing where there are constant trips and traps and where the disciple, like the condemned murderer, seems tied to the dead body of his old sinful self. Like the example told in great literature of the murderer tied to the rotting and festering dead body of his victim until its rottenness wears him down into death.

Outrageous that the one innocent One takes me, lifts me up, shackles Himself to me and ties me to Himself. Then He carries this dead rotting sack of sin up a hill and is nailed to a cross, there to die my death. This is Outrageous. There are some who have renamed the parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the prodigal father because the father is extreme in his giving.

Is it then more outrageous that Adam and Eve should look at the gifts of God and say, “we think we’ll go for this apple.” Or that God should say, “And I’ll send my Son to be wounded for what you have done.” Outrageous.

Outraged am I at the (in)justice of the whole thing and my part in it. You want to talk about double-minded, look at disciples. We are spineless, filled with confusion and double-mindedness.

We are called to follow the Shepherd, not seeing, not knowing, not experiencing but only following His Word and His ways and to know by faith that He is close at hand, watching over and protecting and guiding us. That is the way of the faithful sheep, walking the path - yes, slowly. That is the way of faith. That is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

¹¹⁴ Over me as a shield and hiding place You are;
I hope in Your word.

Over me as a shield and a hiding place. Ohhh boy do I need that, shield and hiding place, many many days. Estranged and alienated where the whole world wants to go. I am not strong enough to turn the whole world. What am I to do as a sinful sheep. The answer is, belong to the Shepherd, the one who is over me as a shield and hiding place. No matter how weary my steps, He is my hiding place. No matter as Luther said, how many the spears and arrows that are pointed at us that we do not see, He is still our shield.

¹¹⁵ Out! Away from me you evil-doers;
that I may keep the commandments of my God!

And so, in the face of the world, we are bold to say, "Out! Away! I want the commandments of God. I want His words and His ways to treasure them in my heart. And though I fail, I will look to Him, time and time again, to forgive and raise up." I want His words, His way and Himself.

¹¹⁶ On Your promise establish me, that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!

I know that I have nothing and come with empty hands. So this is a prayer "on Your promise." The promise of course, is all in Jesus. I am lifted up as a sheep to be set upon the rock of His promise. And so I am established, and even though the wind and the waves beat against this house, it shall not fall.

¹¹⁷ Oh, sustain me, that I may be safe,
and devote myself to Your statutes continually!

The psalmist does not pray to be made strong against the world, but to be sustained so he may not fall but devote himself to God's statutes. This is a good example. Just be the sheep and let Him be the fierce Shepherd. It's like the Chinese painting of the sheep behind the shepherd and the shepherd swinging his staff into the head of the wolf. From the way the picture is painted you know there will be pain in the next instant. The wolf does not understand Who it is he tried to sneak past.

Over and over again, the devil gets clocked (thwacked) and knocked silly. The shepherd has foreknowledge and knows exactly where the head of the wolf will be and (blammo) knocks him off his feet. And all the sheep has to do is be a sheep. (And all that's there for the sheep is, be a sheep.) Sit there behind the shepherd and watch the wolf squirm around and struggle to get back up on its feet and understand that the wolf is in for more thumping.

¹¹⁸ Off You cast all who go astray from Your statutes;
truly their cunning is in vain.

¹¹⁹ Out, like dross You discard all the wicked of the earth;
therefore, I treasure Your testimonies.

How about an illustration. One day my oldest son brought over a friend and said, "He's a really good chess player. Here, Dad play him." So I sat down and gave him the first move. He promptly moved out a rook's pawn which told me exactly what he was going to do for the first half of the game. So I moved my pieces into place and simply took his as they came out.

All the devil's cunning, wiles, cleverness and so-called wisdom are totally and completely worthless when tried against the One who knows ahead of time what you are going to do.

Then my middle son brought home a friend and said, "He's a good player." and he promptly moved out a rook's pawn. It was disappointing. So, in one sense the devil is a disappointing adversary to God, always trying the same foolish thing. Every time he thinks he has new craftiness and wiles; he tries the same foolish act and for it he gets himself another thumping. Does God wait for the devil's head to clear so he can put together a "new set" of wiles and craftiness? Then thwack, blammo with the sheep sitting behind Him, perfectly safe. Watching their Shepherd and admiring His wisdom, might and power.

Does He then take the wolf (devil) and drag him by the tail and throw him off into the rubbish? That is one way of describing the last book of the Bible. Summary outline of Revelation: drag, drag, drag, toss, splash (into the Lake of Fire).

¹²⁰ Overwhelmed is my flesh with awe of You;
and Your judgments I revere.

So I press on. On this path, which may at times be overwhelming. But there is set before us an upward calling and a distant triumph song. I do recommend the book The Distant Triumph Son by Seigbert Becker as worth the read (couldn't put it down, read it in one day).

Prayer:

Ah Lord, how long and how far in this world, separated and trying to walk in following You, unsteady, stumbling, and weak in faith. I want to know, long to know and eventually need to see Your salvation. But you call me sheep, tell me to walk the path of faith. Faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.

So many have walked that path before. It is so easy to see the difficulties, the opposition, the pitfalls, the temptations, and my own weakness. But You are my shield against the fiery darts of the devil. You are my shield and comforter. Endless the number of times You give Your Word, Your promises, Your assurance and the ways that You have been present in my life with Your grace. These are endless and unceasing.

Help me walk this path with my sheep eyes, hearing Your promises with my sheep ears. Being content to simply be Yours and focus on Your promises. They are my life because You are my life. Your ways are my wisdom because You are my wisdom. Your testimonies are my comfort because You are my comfort. I need the solid foundation. You have provided it. I need the cleansing. You have forgiven and called me new. I need the eternity. You have given the eternity in your words, precepts, commandments; in your Means of Grace; in Your Self.

**Until that day we hear His voice Who prayed for us upon the cross
Allelujah, allelujah
Exalting in His church set free, singing salvation's victory.
Allelujah, allelujah, allelujah, allelujah, allelujah.
Amen**

(Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones verse 4, Mark Willig. Zephaniah 3:17)

ⵎ – AYIN

- ¹²¹ Performed have I what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.
- ¹²² Pledge of good, be for Your servant;
that the godless may not oppress me.
- ¹²³ Pining away for Your salvation are my eyes,
and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.
- ¹²⁴ Provide for Your servant according to Your covenant mercies,
and teach me Your statutes.
- ¹²⁵ Perceptiveness give me – I am Your servant;
that I may know Your testimonies.
- ¹²⁶ Pent-up is the time for the LORD to act;
they have broken Your law.[†]
- ¹²⁷ Passionately therefore I treasure Your commandments,
above gold, above fine gold.
- ¹²⁸ Pondering then Your precepts, I direct my steps in all of them;
every false way I hate.

ⵎ – AYIN Part 1

“The Impossible God”

I have tried to learn how to pronounce the letter Ayin (ⵎ). I’ve listened to others try to. I have heard a few who know how but, at least for me it is frankly the impossible letter. So I’m thinking to myself that’s not a bad meditation “The Impossible God” and is what Jesus is and does.

In a number of ways Jesus is the impossible God. Philosophers have said it is not possible to contain the infinite within the finite. So God lying in a manger, God as a baby, God needing to be warmed and fed and nursed, God needing to learn how to potty. Impossible!

For God to be hungry. Impossible. And yet Jesus at the beginning of His ministry fasts for 40 days and 40 nights and after that He was hungry. It is impossible for God to be thirsty, and yet on the cross He said, “I thirst.” It is impossible for God to suffer. It is impossible for God to die. But Jesus does. On the whole theme, God standing there under God and under the law. There to be judged and accept punishment for sins that are not His. Impossible! For me to be right in the eyes of God with the record and trail of sin that I have left in my life. Impossible.

And yet this is a violation of religion. Turns it on its head. Every religion of good works says "No! No no no. This can't be!" Meanwhile Paul says, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." He violates one after another, All of the "you can't do that's" and leaves His disciples and us to puzzle over it. He sends out the message of "in our place" and "for our sake." Actually that's a theme.

My friend Herb said, "The natural way of the sinner is to love the religion of good works and be pointing to everything that he thinks is worth it before God; and it is the job of the law to scare the willies out of him. To pronounce everything he claims is impossible and then to leave him with despair so that he can hear the Gospel in the right way."

There are some funeral practices that go on and on about our good works that go before us and claim a place in heaven. A whole lot of people like the eulogies to tell about the good works of the deceased. We say "No, there is none" We have nothing to trot out in front of God. Everything we do is corrupt and far from earning anything, it condemns us. So all of every religion of good works is no good, lacking and earns wrath.

Meanwhile this impossible God comes to take all sin on Himself and stand under judgment. And this is God. The natural man everywhere and at all times rebels and says, "No, it can't be! Impossible!" But He will do it. And after three days raise himself. And after forty days ascend to heaven, where the human Jesus fills all things. How is it possible for the created body of Jesus to be beyond creation? Many the theologian who says, "No no no! Impossible!"

Much as the same Jesus gives the bread to the disciples and says, "This is (present tense) My body, given (past tense of a future occurrence) for you." Impossible! It violates every standard of what is possible.

I've explained it a few times that it's like Jesus saying this, the disciples looking at him in confusion, and Jesus saying in the modern colloquial "Hold my beer." and then heads off to the garden, to Pilates, to the cross, to the tomb and Easter.

He does the impossible because that is who He is. As He will take this failing flesh, raise it and make it eternal, and I will see the impossible done to my own flesh.

What then do we make of this impossible God doing impossible things? Do we argue with Him? Or do we enjoy knowing Him and look forward to the greatest of all celebrations and parties? There are some things that would be very foolish to argue about.

And when He comes with angels singing glory,
pow'rs of evil fall, the judgment ends their story;
we'll join with saints of every place and time,
to praise the one with Name above all names, divine.

In perfect love He has given the love,
and of His great work of bringing salvation home to our story.
And before Him I will kneel with blessed adoration.
For He the Lamb who was slain is reigning to eternity,

and in that celebration of that life join we.
In perfect faith we face-to-face will see
and know the story of how He came for our whole race's life.
(Rev. Mark Willig)

Prayer:

Lord God, You call me by Your Word, from eternity into my days, my hours and moments. You speak your Word. You tell me that You are my Father and I Your child, and that I am loved. You invite me to walk through eternity with You. Help me to be glad of Your Word and to treasure it, that more and more of my life may be built on the foundation that You have laid, and You built up; so that day by day I may be more solidly established in the promises that You give.

Ayin Part 2:

“Oh to See”

¹²¹ Performed have I what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.

¹²² Pledge of good, be for Your servant;
that the godless may not oppress me.

We do not fit the statements of faithfulness. There is another Who must do that and be that in our place. We are called to walk our walk, keeping our eyes on Him. “Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame.” (Hebrews 12:2-3)

If you want to borrow money from the bank, they will probably ask for a pledge. Something that can be owed in case you default, and then it becomes theirs. The Son of God, more dear than anything else, has made Himself our pledge. He guarantees the fulfillment of the law, and if we default in our righteousness, He is given to be under the law and judged. He has, and it has. Never forget the price of your freedom. As Luther says, “the cost” so that I may engage in my silly little pursuits. But that is what sheep do.

¹²³ Pining away for Your salvation are my eyes,
and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.

¹²⁴ Provide for Your servant according to Your covenant mercies,
and teach me Your statutes.

¹²⁵ Perceptiveness give me – I am Your servant;
that I may know Your testimonies.

Now do I want to see these things. Oh yes! Oh yes! Pining to see the fulfillment of Your promise. “That these mine eyes may gladly see, Oh Son of God Your glorious Face, my Savior and my font of grace” (From “Lord Thee I Love”)

In the meanwhile, my provision is the covenant mercies, Means of Grace. Teach me Your ways and how You are making all things new, built around Your cross, founded on Your mercy, Your Self.

Let me know Your ways and words and precepts. You give me the ability to see and understand them. Then go back to the “old home” and walk among the witnesses of God’s doing (as in the meditation for Aleph Part 2).

¹²⁶ Pent-up is the time for the LORD to act;
they have broken Your law.[†]

Pent-up indeed. Because the violation has been constant since the garden of Eden. Pent-up is usually used of judgment or wrath that is pent-up and will come pouring out on sinners (I am one). Pent-up also is the desire to pour out blessings on those whom God has chosen, marked, named and forgiven and given his grace. Pent-up indeed like waters building up behind a dam, the dam being the last day and the waters being the waters of grace.

¹²⁷ Passionately therefore I treasure Your commandments,
above gold, above fine gold.

One of the places where the other meaning of the commandment words “you shall” appears at the end of Matthew 5 where Jesus says, “You shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” It is spoken by the only One who could actually make it happen. So passionately I desire Your commandments. In part they tell me about future me, when He has brought His work to completion and raised me to life to see Him “Oh Son of God Your glorious face, My Savior and my font of grace. Oh Jesus Christ my prayer attend, my prayer attend and I will praise You without end.

¹²⁸ Pondering then Your precepts, I direct my steps in all of them;
every false way I hate.

So in my soul I latch on to the precepts and wisdom of God. I want them because I want Him. The false ways are hated because they would lead me away from Him.

Prayer:

A very good prayer for this section is the third verse of “Lord Thee I Love.” It is a prayer of longing.

**Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing. And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my Fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end.
Amen**

9 – PE

- ¹²⁹ Remarkable are Your testimonies;
therefore my soul holds them close.
- ¹³⁰ Revealing Your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.
- ¹³¹ Rises a sigh from my lips;
because I long for Your commandments.
- ¹³² Return to me with Your grace;
with judgments favoring those who love Your name.
- ¹³³ Regulate my footsteps according to Your promise;
let not any iniquity get mastery over me.
- ¹³⁴ Rescue me from man's oppression;
that I may keep Your precepts.
- ¹³⁵ Restore to Your servant the light of Your face;
and teach me Your statutes.
- ¹³⁶ Rivers of tears flow from my eyes;
because we do not keep Your law.[†]

Meditation: **"Something More"**

"Also He has put eternity in the heart of man." (Ecclesiastes 3:11) And the rock group sings (sound of clock ticking) "Ticking away, moments that make up a dull day. Fritter and waste the hours in an offhand way. Kicking around a piece of ground in your hometown. Waiting for someone or something to show you the way." Also, "He has put eternity in the heart of man." Then at the end of the song, "Thought I had something more to say. Shortly before the end, far away, across the fields, the tolling of the iron bell calls the faithful to their knees. . . ." (Pink Floyd)

Is that all there is? There must be something more.

- ¹²⁹ Remarkable are Your testimonies;
therefore my soul holds them close.

Going back to the testimonies, the telling by God of what He has done, from Genesis on. They call to us and whether we want to or not, we realize that they are above and beyond other things. He calls us with eternity.

- ¹³⁰ Revealing Your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.

And so the Word of God sneaks in. And though people think, “Oh, this is simple minded, old fashioned, etc.” It carries with it eternity and truth, and light for the simple and with it the deep questions of life, purpose and meaning, it is astonishingly profound; because God created us to walk with Him.

¹³¹ Rises a sigh from my lips;
because I long for Your commandments.

And yet we get busy with life and forget what this is about. Remembering we long for them, those questions and answers that call us to plumb the depths of knowledge and the heights of existence.

¹³² Return to me with Your grace;
with judgments favoring those who love Your name.

If I have heard God’s call, I call out, asking for Him to come once more with His grace, knowledge and wisdom, and call me into the knowledge of eternity.

¹³³ Regulate my footsteps according to Your promise;
let not any iniquity get mastery over me.

I desire the sweet part, according to Your promise. Let me walk according to the promises of God. Those promises tell me of my future, and in the promises it is a future of blessing. I find out what freedom is. Iniquity is Inequality in the balances of truth, unevenness in the balances of truth. iniquity is when my understanding of what is true and right is cockeyed. (A paraphrase of something God spoke to the Israelites - “How do you dare call me unfair. It is your balances. They are out of whack.”)

So the IRS man is working at a deli part-time. A woman comes in and says she wants a chicken because she has guests coming over. So he bends down and gets a chicken and puts it on the scales. She says, “You know, that still is a little bit light.” He puts the chicken back, reaches back in the case and grabs one that is smaller, pretending that it is heavier. He puts it on the scale and leaves his thumb pushing down on the scale. The woman says, “Yes! That’s perfect! I’ll take them both.” He is caught. Iniquity is the image of scales that are fixed to cheat the customer, or scales with the thumb still on it.

In the news this week there has been the story of a scam, cheating investors out of a billion dollars. And the old saying is, *caveat emptor*, buyer beware. That is the way of

the world. We call out for God to watch over us so that we can be free to pursue the spiritual way.

¹³⁴ Rescue me from man's oppression;
that I may keep Your precepts.

¹³⁵ Restore to Your servant the light of Your face;
and teach me Your statutes.

¹³⁶ Rivers of tears flow from my eyes;
because we do not keep Your law.[†]

There is a cry for rescue. Rescue me from what is wrong here. Precepts are the wisdom of God. And again the cry to reconnect with God.

The psalmist says "we do not keep Your law." Isaiah identifies with the unfaithful so he can pray a prayer of repentance and call them. Jesus prays, "Why have You forsaken Me?" keeping company with us sinners and our sin. Identifying with us so that He can hoist us up, and with the sloppy underbelly of the sheep on His shoulders He can carry us back home, and call the angels to celebrate.

Prayer:

Oh Lord, my Lord, my soul's great friend, my teacher and my savior; You call me day by day and night by night to walk with you and hear your promises and precepts. Your promises tell me my future. Your precepts tell me of your work in doing plan of salvation. Still call me day after day to know You, to know eternity and all You have to share with this simple, humble human being. Let me hear the upward call and treasure Your wisdom and ways, Your precepts and statutes, and the judgments You do in our favor at Your own expense. So let me learn the walk of mercy and truth, of goodness and right, and in that knowledge find satisfaction, peace and rest for my soul. Teach me and be my wisdom. Lead me and walk with me. You are my eternal wisdom and way, and knowing You is the perfect fulfillment. Amen

Y – TSADE

- ¹³⁷ Singularly righteous are You, O LORD,
and upright are Your judgments,
- ¹³⁸ setting forth Your testimonies in righteousness;
and in all faithfulness.
- ¹³⁹ Strident zeal consumes me,
because my foes forget Your words.
- ¹⁴⁰ Smelter-tested is Your promise,
and Your servant loves it.
- ¹⁴¹ Small am I and despised;
but I do not forget Your precepts.
- ¹⁴² Standing righteous forever is Your righteousness,
and Your law[†] is true.
- ¹⁴³ Sorrow and distress have come upon me;
but Your commandments are my delight.
- ¹⁴⁴ Set forever, Your testimonies are righteous,
give me understanding that I may live.

Meditation:

“Smelter Tested -?”

Any walk of wisdom, any pursuit of good, any spirituality will be tested. It is unavoidable. The question will come, are you sure about this? Is this the way you really want to go?

- ¹³⁷ Singularly righteous are You, O LORD,
and upright are Your judgments,

There are consequences. Another old saying goes, “No good deed goes unpunished.” There is both sarcasm and wisdom in that, because we will meet not only the consequences of what we have done in error, we will deal with the results of getting out of step with the world and not taking the easy road. But stick with what is right and true. It is worth it. Simply said, if God calls us and His way goes against the world, is it worth following God? Is it worth it for truth and wisdom? Is it worth it to live a life of goodness and mercy? Yes, we know it is. But that does not take away from the testing, in many and various ways. We know the faces, we have seen heroes on TV and in newspapers. We have heard them say, “I would do it all again.” And God calls us to walk with Him and promises eternal glory and blessing.

- ¹³⁸ setting forth Your testimonies in righteousness;
and in all faithfulness.
- ¹³⁹ Strident zeal consumes me,

because my foes forget Your words.

Notice the things of eternal worth, Your testimonies, righteousness and faithfulness. So what if they are my foes. There is a thing of eternal value to have here and that is Your Word. And those foes, if they receive Your Word are then my companions and friends for eternity.

¹⁴⁰ Smelter-tested is Your promise,
and Your servant loves it.

Called together in Your Word and in Your promise, we share in a treasure. And yes there actually is a Hebrew word for tested in a smelter (צָרַף tsaraph). The smelter is where you put the ore, so that in the heat the lesser things can be burned away and the gold or silver can be concentrated and shine. So with the promises of God when anything of lesser value fades away:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of this earth will go strangely dim
in the light of His glory and grace.
(Helen H. Lemmel, 1922)

We, being Christians in this world, we do know the truth of being smelter tested. And of course, none of this compares to the One who hung on the cross in the full heat of the fury of the law and the hatred of the devil, forsaken by friends and mocked by enemies. The verse of one of the songs says that the greatest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that Justice gave. But nothing can overcome Him. Nothing can defeat Him. He permitted all those things, took them patiently and on the third day claimed life and victory for us.

¹⁴¹ Small am I and despised;
but I do not forget Your precepts.

¹⁴² Standing righteous forever is Your righteousness,
and Your law[†] is true.

Small am I. There are many who claim to be much more important and powerful. Despised. What worth is there in me? God spoke His wisdom and I do not forget Your precepts.

You have the forever righteousness. You have the forever true. And now, You have given me those things. They are my treasure. You are my treasure.

¹⁴³ Sorrow and distress have come upon me;
but Your commandments are my delight.

This life brings sorrow. This world brings distress. But You give Word, commandment and promise, with delight and joy. To have God's things, to hold them in my soul is delight, life, glory and eternity.

¹⁴⁴ Set forever, Your testimonies are righteous,
give me understanding that I may live.

And the testimonies and story of the love of God is set forever. Giving righteousness You pronounce peace and blessing "be with you." Amen

Prayer:

For the prayer, I offer my hymn, "A Canaanite, She Comes to Pray."

Hymn "A Canaanite, She Comes to Pray" (Tune LSB # 666 "O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe")



1 A Ca - naan - ite, She comes to pray Her daugh - ter,
2 But what a price, The child to win! A mir - ror
3 The fear - ful hoards, With e - vil's might, They gath - er
4 Oh wond - rous Love, What have You done? The Fath - er
5 Out - side the camp He came to win My soul for
6 Then can the grave O'er us pre - vail; The tomb en -



loved, Is torn a - way, By de - vils, sore, tor - men - ted.
of Her peo - ple's sin; The ran - som is God's own Son,
round With dread - ful spite To mock the sep - a - ra - tion.
of - fers up His Son To bear the judg - ment's rend - ing.
God And bring a - gain Man - kind in - to com - mun - ion.
close? No! They must fail. His death is death's un - do - ing.



Where else to go But to the Christ? The Son of
Whom He will give In - to the fires Of Sa - tan's
The rend - ing of The Trin - i - ty The fall of
"Be - hold My Son Who for the lost, With per - fect
Un - rav - el - ing Our twist - ed faith In Sat - an's
The third day dawns, And Love has won. The curse is



God, Of Dav - id's race. Her faith - less walk is end - ed.
hate, A sac - ri - fice Be - yond im - ag - in - a - tion.
God, Is all they see; But God forms our sal - va - tion.
faith Prays from the cross, With My love ov - er - com - ing."
lies. Christ's faith - ful death Has healed our se - par - a - tion.
gone, And God's own Son Claims me for life un - end - ing.

ᵑ – QOPH (revised to use Q as the first letter)

- ¹⁴⁵ Quick of my heart cries out, answer me O LORD;
I will keep Your statutes!
- ¹⁴⁶ Questing You I call; save me
that I may observe Your testimonies.
- ¹⁴⁷ Quickly with the first light dawning, I rise and cry for help;
I hope in Your words.
- ¹⁴⁸ Quietly night watches pass, my eyes waken;
that I may meditate on Your promise.
- ¹⁴⁹ Quest O LORD, search out my voice;
by Your covenant mercies and Your favorable judgment preserve me.
- ¹⁵⁰ Quarry of those who pursue with evil intent;
they are far from Your Law.[†]
- ¹⁵¹ Quite trustworthy are your commandments O LORD,
Truly You are near.
- ¹⁵² Quoting Your words within, I have known
that Your testimonies resound forever.

Meditation:

“Night Watches”

- ¹⁴⁵ Quick of my heart cries out, answer me O LORD;
I will keep Your statutes!
- ¹⁴⁶ Questing You I call; save me
that I may observe Your testimonies.
- ¹⁴⁷ Quickly with the first light dawning, I rise and cry for help;
I hope in Your words.
- ¹⁴⁸ Quietly night watches pass, my eyes waken;
that I may meditate on Your promise.

The pattern and ways of God connecting with us are remarkable. Time - I rise at midnight, through the watches of the night, at first light. And then again His testimonies, ways, promises, words, precepts, ordinances, judgments to give His favor to me, statues, etc.,etc. He surrounds me with His attention and care. Through salvation and through eternity, He decides to walk with me and be my friend. And all the way through he calls to me to walk with Him.

So the psalmist responds calling out to God, a beautiful relationship. I may be in danger, but more so, there is God.

So begins the uncertainty of the day; with a call, and with His Word. See how the psalmist knows his need, from the beginning to end of the day, and through the night watches, and the in-between.

¹⁴⁹ Quest O LORD, search out my voice;
by Your covenant mercies and Your favorable judgment preserve me.

In your covenant mercies “hear my prayer.” By Your favorable judgments, save me. “Indeed we deserve nothing but punishment, but we pray in this petition that He would give them all to us by grace.” (Small Catechism) In the words of the Bible we learn that it is His Will for us. In Jesus, it is a wonderful relationship.

¹⁵⁰ Quarry of those who pursue with evil intent;
they are far from Your Law.[†]
¹⁵¹ Quite trustworthy are your commandments O LORD,
Truly You are near.

Again there is opposition, and there are enemies, but more so, there is God. And even more than the psalmist feeling his need, the psalmist knows the nearness of God, and the trustworthiness of His Word. “Let your holy angel be with me that the wicked foe may have no power over me”. . . “then go to sleep at once and in peace.” (Luther’s evening prayer in the Small Catechism)

¹⁵² Quoting Your words within, I have known
that Your testimonies resound forever.

Quoting Your words, time out of mind they are my complete experience of You; more constant and frequent than I can possibly know.

Notice how the whole Psalm is built around the Word. Around “the Word” there are companion phrases built around: precepts, promises, statutes, ordinances, testimonies, and judgements to show favor to the Christian. These are the constant refrain, and as often as the psalmist calls on God, before that is the call from God. Both the psalmist and we know it very well. “By my own reason or strength, I could not . . . but God has . . . kept me in the faith.” (Third Article of the Creed, explanation) That reminds me of the last thing I say to myself within myself before heading out to do a funeral “Make their hearts burn. The grace and promises of God are so rich and so full. Simply lay them out for everybody, and they will know that God has come to walk among them, calling them.” So much is given and promised and spoken to us.

Prayer (from the hymn "Abide with Me"):
Oh Lord, my Lord, draw near. Be near.

From the first light of dawn to the last light of twilight "I need Your presence every passing hour, what but Your grace can foil the tempter's power." In the night watches, in-between, time to time my eyes waken. Where shall I focus my mind. "Abide with me, fast falls the even tide. The darkness depends, Lord with me abide."

Your Word; Your promises and faithfulness; these call me. I could not call to You if You did not first call my soul. And though I am helpless in the quarry of the enemy, You are my guard and stay. "Help of the helpless, Lord, abide with me."

Search out my soul Oh Lord, search deep within it and find what You have put there Yourself, Your Word and faith. By that Word call me. By that faith give my soul its walk with You. "Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes. Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heaven's morning breaks as earth's vain shadows flee. In life, in death Oh Lord abide with me." You don't just give eternity. You, Yourself are my eternity.

Amen

7 – RESH

- ¹⁵³ Upon my affliction look – and deliver me,
for I do not forget Your law.[†]
- ¹⁵⁴ Undertake my cause and redeem me;
give me life according to Your promise.
- ¹⁵⁵ Unknown to the wicked is salvation,
for they do not seek Your statutes.
- ¹⁵⁶ Unequaled is Your mercy, O LORD;
give me life according to Your just decrees.
- ¹⁵⁷ Unnumbered are my persecutors and adversaries,
but from Your testimonies do not swerve.
- ¹⁵⁸ Umbrage I feel as I look upon the treacherous,
because they do not keep Your commands.
- ¹⁵⁹ Understand how I love Your precepts!
Give me life O LORD according to Your covenant mercies.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ultimate truth is the sum of Your word,
and forever are all the decrees of Your righteousness.

Meditation:

“Unequaled”

- ¹⁵³ Upon my affliction look – and deliver me,
for I do not forget Your law.[†]

The Lord knows. God knows. Where else can the psalmist look for hope. Where else can I look for hope. He is the God Who knows, Who sees, Who speaks. His Word and His words remain. Unlike the gods in the nations surrounding the People of God: “He is there and He is not silent.” So long as the heaven lasts, so long as His Word. Firm! And that is my hope.

- ¹⁵⁴ Undertake my cause and redeem me;
give me life according to Your promise.

In verse 2 the prayer is more specific. Undertake my cause. He is the God Who acts. It does not say exactly how He will undertake, but like in the last book of the Old Testament, God calls out to His people and He says, “Then once again you will see.” Notice that He says this with perfect understanding to those who cry out their need to see Him act, to hear His words, to know that He is with them and He understands. So my hope, is also once again to see the acts of God: and the words of God putting the world in order.

¹⁵⁵ Unknown to the wicked is salvation,
for they do not seek Your statutes.

Why would they, since in their own minds they are completely sufficient of themselves. They need nobody, no moral absolutes, no right and wrong, no great standard of truth, and that is how they wander completely astray. One of my professors used to say, "Education requires repentance. Learning demands that you admit you do not know." (Dr. Klan) But they do not, and they will not. So they do not turn, and remain obstinate. Neither I, nor any other human can argue and persuade for such a change. This is only the work of the Spirit. The obdurate need a new birth, a new beginning.

¹⁵⁶ Unequaled is Your mercy, O LORD;
give me life according to Your just decrees.

First, unequalled mercy is equal to any weakness and any marker of death within me. That is guaranteed by the Son of God. Second, it is unequalled in being infinite, eternal and to perfection. "You must be perfect" says Jesus. (Matthew 5:48) Grabbing the entirety of the commandments and pulling them into His proclaiming of the Gospel, "Because I live, you will live." (John 14:19) "And no one will take your joy from you." (John 16:22) "All the days until the fulfillment of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Those are specific guarantees: and the guarantee is His own suffering, bleeding, dying and rising - He lives.

¹⁵⁷ Unnumbered are my persecutors and adversaries,
but from Your testimonies do not swerve.

He is equal to this great act of salvation as he is equal to every and any question. He is absolutely and totally worth following no matter what. Look around and you find unnumbered are the "fiery darts of the devil" as Luther said. Unnumbered are the weaknesses, wondering and betrayals of my old sinful nature. Unnumbered are the potential conflicts in this world, where any sin is allowed except the "sin" of being a Christian and following Him. The world rejects, but Jesus calls. Come close in prayer. Come close and hear the sweet message. Come close and walk in life and with His promises.

¹⁵⁸ Umbrage I feel as I look upon the treacherous,
because they do not keep Your commands.

¹⁵⁹ Understand how I love Your precepts!
Give me life O LORD according to Your covenant mercies.

¹⁶⁰ Ultimate truth is the sum of Your word,
and forever are all the decrees of Your righteousness.

So yes, umbrage (not a Harry Potter character). discomfort, ill at ease and offense is there, in a world that seems completely set against God and any idea of goodness and truth. It makes the believer want to cry out as loud as possible, "NO!" So to a world against God there is judgment hanging in wait. It includes us. It includes me. Know the offense, but following Jesus, pray for, reach out, and tell the promise. Those who need it are all people.

Prayer:

See my heart, Oh God, and know how badly I hunger for Your wisdom. How You sort all the universe and my whole life. Where else can I find truth? Your Word is ultimate truth. Amen.

ψ – SIN & SHIN

- ¹⁶¹ Void of cause, princes persecute me,
but my heart stands in awe of Your words.
- ¹⁶² Voicing aloud, I rejoice at Your word
like one who finds great spoil.
- ¹⁶³ Vainglory I hate and abhor,
but I love Your law.[†]
- ¹⁶⁴ Venerating You, seven times a day I praise
for Your just and righteous decrees.
- ¹⁶⁵ Very great peace have those who love Your law;[†]
nothing can make them stumble.
- ¹⁶⁶ Victorious salvation from You, O LORD, I await,
As I follow Your commandments.
- ¹⁶⁷ Vigilantly my soul keeps Your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.
- ¹⁶⁸ Vigilantly I keep Your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are open before You.

Meditation:

“As They Were Going”

- ¹⁶¹ Void of cause, princes persecute me,
but my heart stands in awe of Your words.

I am an alien here, stranger to this world. There are many who are at home, who thrive, get rich, and are ready to lord it over a stranger like me. I cannot fit in. Where is your heart? That is telling for the one who has fallen in love with the Word of God. But the princes of this world strut through, despising and telling others how I do not belong.

- ¹⁶² Voicing aloud, I rejoice at Your word
like one who finds great spoil.

It would be easier if I could keep quiet about the Word of God. But such a treasure! I cannot help but speak. Ah, to voice aloud the riches of God’s Word. I cannot hide where my heart is.

- ¹⁶³ Vainglory I hate and abhor,
but I love Your law.[†]

There are times when I could have the advantage of belonging more, but I look and see how empty it is, and how filled with eternal truth is Your Word. So I pull back and avoid glory and riches here. Okay. That stuff is empty anyway.

¹⁶⁴ Venerating You, seven times a day I praise
for Your just and righteous decrees.

So I look to God's Word, and His wisdom and His decrees throughout the day. Throughout the day praise rises from my heart. And I pray, Lord know the praise of my heart.

¹⁶⁵ Very great peace have those who love Your law;[†]
nothing can make them stumble.

And in spite of the conflicts here, there is that deep peace of knowing Your Word, Your law, Your wisdom, and Your statutes. Peace that the world cannot take away.

¹⁶⁶ Victorious salvation from You, O LORD, I await,
As I follow Your commandments.

Yes I wait, but victorious salvation is sure and certain. "From You Oh Lord" says my heart. "From You Oh Lord." Is God worth waiting for? "Yes! Yes!" says my heart in truth. Though we wait, He has never failed to bring salvation. He will come and we will say, "This is Our God. We waited and He saved us." (Isaiah 25, Malachi 3, John 19:11 ff)

¹⁶⁷ Vigilantly my soul keeps Your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.

The story of salvation, the acts of God told by God, these testimonies I hold and keep and treasure. They tell who He is, and it is sweet to know Him. He wrote Himself into my story and I have forgiveness. He wrote me into His story, and I have eternity. By His Word He has joined us.

¹⁶⁸ Vigilantly I keep Your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are open before You.

His wisdom and His works, they are the treasure of my soul to guard. I am seen all the way through. All my ways are open to Him. Even more remarkable, all His ways are open to me. He has revealed His very heart, and of all the treasures that this psalm names and lists, that one is the greatest.

Prayer:

A verse about the journey says, "As they were going up to Jerusalem Jesus was walking ahead. They were amazed and those who followed were afraid." (Mark 10:32)

A song lyric says, "Savior like a Shepherd lead us."

The disciples were afraid and the crowd followed. There was good reason for disciples to be afraid. The path of discipleship lead (leads) to suffering, rejection, and through death and resurrection. "Jesus was walking ahead." As Shepherd He knows the way - both for the Shepherd and for the sheep. Rejection, persecution, a final enemy - He was equal to the task. Struggles of faith, fiery darts, old sinful nature and a final enemy - He is equal to the task. The disciple can follow and simply pay attention to sheep-ness. The victory is not ours to win, even if those words are used somewhere. It is His, and He is equal to it.

There is reason to be afraid. You have said, "fear not" and told me to walk right through that pack of wolves with fiery darts flying all around. Sometimes they hit home. A wolf tears into a sheep and a fiery dart stings. With these eyes I do not see spiritual fiery darts, or those other spiritual dangers. Be close at hand. Let Your promises be my comfort and Your victory, my spiritual shield and protection. I do not know how to be anything but a sheep. Faith is big and strong, but I am weak and small. "I need Your presence every passing hour. What but Your grace can foil the tempter's power . . . Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies." You have promised, and so You have named Yourself "I with you Am." Good Savior, good Shepherd, abide with me. Amen.

ת – TAU

- ¹⁶⁹ Welcome my cry before Your face, O LORD;
give me understanding according to Your word!
- ¹⁷⁰ Welcome my supplication before Your face,
deliver me according to Your word.
- ¹⁷¹ Worshipful shouts my lips will pour forth,
for You teach me Your statutes.
- ¹⁷² Wake, my tongue! – to sing of Your word,
for all Your commandments are righteous!
- ¹⁷³ With Your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen Your precepts.
- ¹⁷⁴ Watchfully waiting for Your salvation, O LORD;
what great delight is Your Torah[†] to me!
- ¹⁷⁵ Would that my soul may live and praise You,
while Your ordinances deliver me!
- ¹⁷⁶ Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – seek Your servant!*
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!
- *Or, “Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – You seek Your servant.
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!”
The translation depends on the vowel pointing.

Meditation: **“Tau”**

It is now Thanksgiving, and it is a special delight that we have come in this writing to the meditation for the letter Tau. Several things come together. Number one, I learned at some point in my education that there is a Proto-Hebrew or Paleo-Hebrew. During the history of the language the shaping of the letters shifted to be much closer to the letters of Aramaic. Aramaic was spoken in many more countries and was a more popular and widely used language. The Aramaic letters were more squared and “boxy.” There were less curves and angles.

Number two, while taking a class in Ezekiel we studied chapter 9. While in exile in Babylon Ezekiel said (in typical Ezekiel imagery) that the Spirit of God picked him up by the hair and carried him off to the temple in Jerusalem so he could see what they are doing. While going to the temple Ezekiel saw: altars to foreign gods; what I can only describe as a “frat-boy bug-eating” cult. Outside Ezekiel saw the worship of sun, moon and planetary bodies. “And shall they not be swept away?” But beforehand in chapter 9 a man in a white linen garb with a

tablet and either brush or pen was commissioned to go through Jerusalem and mark with a Tau on their foreheads all the faithful who would be preserved.

Number three, and then the ad came on the radio that the Field Museum in Chicago would be hosting a display of the Dead Sea Scrolls. There was only one thing to do. Pack a few things in the car and the wife, who is also interested in languages, and head off for a seven hour drive to go see. So after seven hours of driving, and an overnight stop at my mother's, we got to the Field Museum and went in. I spent hours staring at and reading everything that I could on the Dead Sea Scrolls, and went over to the Paleo-Hebrew display. Now, the Paleo-Hebrew Tau was very different. The more modern begins at the top left and has a horizontal line that then curves downward and follows the right-hand of the block of the letter and reaches the bottom right. There is at the bottom left what looked to me like a backward L and then a short stroke off to the left. The Paleo-Hebrew Tau is what looks like a lower case "t" leaning off to the left 45 degrees. I'm not going to ask you to look it up and see if you think it does not look like a cross, leaning to the left 45 degrees, but it sure does look like that. It's like if you picked up a cross, put a shoulder under the junction of the upright and the crossbar, and started dragging it along the road, outside the city of Jerusalem. Again, I may not tell you to be impressed by the significance of that, but I sure am. Impressed by how this amazing Psalm, finds its way at the end to the cross of the hill of Calvary. This amazing meditation on the Word of God and all of the related terms comes home. And I remember that same professor who taught Ezekiel said "Torah" can be translated in many ways, including one of them being "Gospel." Exactly! That is also why I chose throughout the translation to render the word "Torah" as the same word "Torah" with an inserted superscripted small cross following the "h".

Now to verse 169. There is the concentration of more frequent words beginning with the appointed letter. (In English it is W.) (There is a bit more alliteration going on in this section.)

¹⁶⁹ Welcome my cry before Your face, O LORD;
give me understanding according to Your word!

Verse one is a call out from a sheep, a disciple, who must walk following his shepherd in an alien and hostile world. But God is the God who hears and the God who welcomes our cry.

¹⁷⁰ Welcome my supplication before Your face,
deliver me according to Your word.

And why should our prayers and supplications be heard? Simply because they, and we, are carried along in the prayers of Jesus from the cross. There are three: one “Father, forgive them . . .” ; two “Eloi, Eloi” (My God, My God); three, “Father, into Your hands . . . “

¹⁷¹ Worshipful shouts my lips will pour forth,
for You teach me Your statutes.

Now the cry out of the sheep, disciple, becomes the celebrating shout of worship. Assured, we celebrate because You connect me with Your Word.

¹⁷² Wake, my tongue! – to sing of Your word,
for all Your commandments are righteous!

And the call goes forward, “Wake my tongue!” That is similar to Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord O my soul.” The sheep, disciple, calls out to his own tongue, and then shifts who he is addressing and calls out to God, to sing of Your statutes.

¹⁷³ With Your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen Your precepts.

And again, the call out of prayer. He is not only the God who welcomes the prayer, not only the God who welcomes our worship. He is the God who acts “with Your hand. . . “ It goes together like two apologetics books back in the 1970’s titled He is There and He is There and He is not Silent. There specifically defined, He is not silent; He answers with His hand. He acts. Is He worth following then? Yes, yes, oh yes He is! Even if I do not see? More than me seen - He sees; and He acts. Yes, yes, yes He is!

There is someone who comes along carrying and dragging what looks like a Paleo Tau. It is a cross, and He says “Follow Me.” And what the Spirit has put inside me, calls out in response “Lord!” And though my little-faith steps are faltering, and I have no way of keeping up with Him, He patiently leads and guides. I know Him as my Shepherd and Savior.

¹⁷⁴ Watchfully waiting for Your salvation, O LORD;
what great delight is Your Torah[†] to me!

Watchfully waiting, yes. What great delight indeed is Your Torah! And again, the final completion of the Torah, is the cross.

¹⁷⁵ Would that my soul may live and praise You,
while Your ordinances deliver me!

The great desire is to live in praise and experience God's great story of delivering.

¹⁷⁶ Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – seek Your servant!*
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!

*Or, "Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – You seek Your servant.
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!"

The translation depends on the vowel pointing.

Wayward have I wandered - notice the alliteration. It is the prayer of one who is far from God. Again, pointing to the cross and the middle prayer from the cross "Eloi, Eloi . . ." He had to come all this way to meet me where I was. He comes all this way to stand with me and to carry my separation. He calls out "follow Me" as He begins to head home. Psalm 22 verse one, "Eloi, Eloi" must be the path that leads to Psalm 22:22 "I will praise You in the assembly." There He will gather us, and as the One with the cross gathers us, it becomes the place of blessing. "Follow Me."

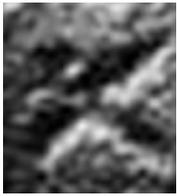
And then a little puzzle. Is it "You seek Your servant" or "seek Your servant!"? "You seek Your servant" is an imperfect (hifl) and a statement of faith. The first vowel point looks like a capital "T", but it is a vowel point that comes from the "A" vowel. The other possible translation, "Seek Your servant!" is an imperative (piel). It is a call out to God in the prayer. The first vowel point that looks exactly like the other, looks like a capital "T". Its origins are from a short "o". They sound exactly the same. Look exactly the same. I spent a week trying to figure out which one it had to be, and concluded it's a matter of take your pick. My choice is to take it as an imperative in the prayer. In the Hebrew, piel, it is an intensive form of the word. Great passion is expressed. The Psalm has been leading up to this great expression of feeling for one hundred seventy-six verses.

Prayer:

Psalm 119 is a Psalm of great feeling. In no way is it a dry psalm, listing 176 things I can say about the Word. Rather it is the Psalm of the Great Disciple,

Who comes to gather His sheep, to stand with His sheep, and call to His Father as He begins to bring us home It is the Psalm of journeying and questing, discovery and gathering, the cry out and the long journey back home to where there will be celebration forever.

Oh Lord, My Friend, You have come to seek and to save, and to bring us home. When I hear You call “Follow Me” and see Your cross, help me to know what lies ahead: the gathering, the celebrating, the rejoicing to be together and the long, long, path of eternal life. Amen.



Paleo-Hebrew Tau

The Great Psalm



Psalm 119



Part 2

Words

Part 2 – Words, Introduction

This may be off the main subject, but so what. In the earlier introduction I mentioned, or started to mention, or intended to mention, or something like that, how some things in growing up have influenced this work. I grew up in an all-boy family. There were four of us brothers. We were rough on each other. If you let it be seen that something somebody said bothered you, there would be more of them going at it and intensifying your discomfort until you could deal with it. In the 1970's there was a thing called all-night Risk parties where we put on really bad science fiction movies and played Risk. I remember one time, one of us (C, the youngest) was about to get wiped off the board, so he switched tactics to stalling. He did conversations where the dice were talking to each other. He would talk to and persuade one of the die to be rolled and when he did he would drop the other one on the floor and then have to go searching for it, while the rest of us had to sit and wait. He took game pieces and did a little melodrama where one of them would leave, plastic piece, going boing, boing, boing off in a huff. And then another one would go and work at persuading him to come back and play some more.

It was to say at least odd to be sitting there at 4:30 in the morning watching all this happen while trying to anticipate where the next switch of allegiances would be and guard myself against it, while at the same time plotting to pull a switch on somebody else.

Conversation: (F, the oldest) "What do you mean you are doing that?" (C and P) "We agreed in the kitchen. He gets seven times around the board without having to pay me, and he loans me all his houses to lay out in front of you so long as he gets a portion of the take." (F) "Well I didn't hear any of this." (C and P) "Well that's your fault. We were off in the kitchen with the door shut. You could have snuck and listened at the door. What were you doing out here." (F) "We were making an alliance trying to attack you and pull P into the alliance." (C and P) "Oh yeah?"

Later P comes traipsing out of the kitchen with a half-gallon jug of Tang and wet hands. The half-gallon jug slips out of his hands, shatters on the floor, and now there is a five foot diameter spot of orange in the rug. C, F and me, "Har har har har!"

So, this continued until finally watching the playing with the pieces and the melodramas and the conversations between the dice and the kissing the die and pleading with it to roll well, got too much and one at a time the rest of us decided to quit, whereupon C declared himself the winner. When we challenged, he said, "Find it in the rules. Find it in the rules that you can't talk to your dice and do melodramas. It's not in the rules. Nobody making up the rules to a game thinks of anything like that."

Which all gets us back to the point where I got last time, namely telling one of us "That's nuts! You can't do that! It doesn't work." is more likely to persuade one of us to keep on going. I do remember one of us, runs in my head it was me, saying, "Oh yeah? I was about to quit, but now I gotta finish it."

Why did my mother used to walk through the house muttering. Why does my wife walk through the house muttering. What do they have in common? Oh yeah, I got it, they're both women. That explains it. That's got to be it.

Thanksgiving Day I did the meditation for Tau. It was a great finish for that part. At the end of it, my wife said "Done!" and I said, "No, no, there's a part Two." (Why does my wife walk through the house muttering?)

The plan for Part Two is to build meditations around the words on which the Psalm is built. Think of the word Torah as the spine to which all the other words are attached. The other words are ordinances, precepts, commandments, statutes, testimonies, etc. My plan is a meditation for each word with the exception that Torah gets extra. I do believe that will help give a good definition and provide a balance that will much improve this work.

Word – Bless(ed)

- ¹ Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law[†] of the LORD.
- ² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart.
- ¹² Blessèd are You, O LORD; teach me Your statutes!

Meditation: **“Blessed”**

Way back when, I think I was 18 years old, I went to a Christian bookstore to buy a Bible. I checked several passages to see how it handled things. One of those was the Beatitudes (by the way, it makes sense that the word “Blessed” is a beginning feature in Psalm 119 and in Jesus’ first major sermon (the Sermon on the Mount). I checked out the Beatitudes. They translated as “happy.” I put the Bible back on the shelf and left. I remained a little bit obsessed with the translation of that word for decades, until I was a pastor and could develop some thoughts.

There are two lacking translations. Two takes on the Beatitudes that are lacking. One is to translate blessed as “happy.” The other is to call them the “Be-attitudes.” Both put the onus on the believer to do certain things in order to be blessed. And so, they miss the essential point of blessed. The one says if you practice this attitude, then you will be rewarded, and God will act so that you are fortunate. The other says if you do these things, God will act so that you are happy. (Note: in addition, it is iffy to say, “Happy are those who mourn.” “Happy are you when you are persecuted.”) By putting the onus on the believer to be or do a certain way, that is essentially the definition of Law. It then is quite the opposite of receiving blessings at the initiative of God.

As a pastor in Iowa, I did more work on the Beatitudes. They are quite obviously the exact opposite of what seems to be apparent in this world. They violate the claims of human wisdom. They turn to the reverse of what seems the common and the norm in human life. That is the whole point. By the way, in teaching the commandments I developed an abbreviated fill in the blank quiz for Law and Gospel from several additions of our Catechism. Differences in Law and Gospel. The Law says, “Do and don’t do”. The Gospel says, Done! Everything is done in Jesus Christ.

This is exactly why He came into this world, to pronounce blessings where there were no blessings. In other words, those who mourn are not blessed and would not be blessed until He comes and says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” And pulling from the verse in Revelation 21, He says, “Behold I make all things new.” Again, the persecuted would not be blessed, far from it, until he comes and says, “Blessed are you when they persecute you.” And “Behold I make all things new. This is the role of Him Who comes to change all things. I find a great deal of comfort

and hope in that, and especially because it flies in the face of all those things that would say the opposite and it cannot be. He is the one who does the impossible, and I need the impossible.

Years later, I was delighted to find an excursus on the word “blessed” in a commentary (Arthur Just’s first commentary on Luke). There he reconnects the word with the cross. We would not be blessed unless Jesus was first the blessed One, and we are blessed only in so far as we are connected to Him. So Just reconnects the word to the cross and the blessing begins, exactly at its polar opposite. It begins with the one who is hanging under the curse “Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani.” And yes, indeed the whole pattern is that He brings the blessing to the place that is at the very opposite of blessing. Beginning there He pronounces it to a whole world of human beings under the curse. His Word breaks the darkness, and those who hear His Word are translated into the light.

¹ Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law[†] of the LORD.

The Torah is the record of God’s dealings as told by God of His bringing salvation (with the cross at the center). And note, what has been done on the cross is an absolute. It is the pronouncement by God, creating a new reality.

² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
who seek Him with their whole heart.

Altogether, in other words, every little, tiny, part of life, His testimonies are His witness to what He has done.

¹² Blessèd are You, O LORD;
teach me Your statutes!

Blessed are you Oh Lord, not that He has been blessed by someone else, but He has blessing with Him. He brings it when He comes into the world, and He spreads it through what He does. So “blessed are You” acknowledges the fullness of blessing that is associated with Him. Note: the words surrounding Torah/Law[†] interact constantly through the verses of this Psalm. They reflect facet after facet of the Word of God into and upon each other and make this Psalm a truly good place for us, for our thoughts and souls to dwell. That is the way of it all through the psalm.

(So whatever word starts the meditation, the meditations will bounce back and forth freely through the collection of words associated with Torah/Law[†])

Prayer:

Oh God my friend, You give every blessing, through every danger and threat to the soul You guard and defend me. These are the blessings, and you complete them through Jesus on the cross. So, everything is done, and I simply receive the blessings from Your hand, and they

come by Your choice. Your blessings are so sure for all time that they are absolute. They are so detailed and complete, providing things that I don't even understand that I need. They are "all together." If I would count them, they would be endless. But the greatest one is You, Yourself. You have made Yourself my blessing. That is who You are to me. Help me to know and understand the scope and detail of this relationship You have formed with me; that I may rest in the surety of Your promises. May I dwell on the testimony, the story, of all You have done and will do that my days may be filled with confidence in Your promises, desire to grow in Your precepts, the thrill of Your testimonies, and rest in the truth of Your commands. Amen.

Words – Law/Torah

- 1 Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law[†] of the LORD.
- 18 Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your law.[†]
- 29 Deceitful ways put far from me
and graciously teach me Your law![†]
- 34 Educate me, that I may keep Your law[†]
and observe it with my whole heart.
- 44 Faithfully, then. I will keep Your law[†]
forever and ever.
- 51 Godless men utterly deride me,
but from Your law[†] I will not turn away.
- 53 Galling indignation seizes me because of the wicked,
who forsake Your law.[†]
- 55 Grasping Your name in the night, O LORD, I remember
and keep Your law.[†]
- 61 However the cords of the wicked may entangle me,
I will not forget Your law.[†]
- 70 Insensate like fat is their heart,
but I delight in your law.[†]
- 72 Incomparably more precious to me is the law[†] from Your mouth
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.
- 77 Judge that Your mercy may come – that I may live;
for Your law[†] is my delight.
- 85 Knaves have dug pitfalls for me;
openly contemptuous of Your law.[†]
- 92 'Less Your law[†] had been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
- 97 Mightily I love Your law[†]
It is my meditation all the day.
- 109 Nonstop, my life is at risk,
but I do not forget Your law.[†]
- 113 Outraged am I with the double-minded;
but Your law[†] I love.
- 126 Pent-up is the time for the LORD to act;
they have broken Your law.[†]
- 136 Rivers of tears flow from my eyes;
because we do not keep Your law.[†]

¹⁴² Standing righteous forever is Your righteousness,
and Your law[†] is true.

¹⁵⁰ They draw near who pursue with evil intent;
they are far from Your Law.[†]

¹⁵⁰ Quarry of those who pursue with evil intent;
they are far from Your Law.[†]

¹⁵³ Upon my affliction look – and deliver me,
for I do not forget Your law.[†]

¹⁶³ Vainglory I hate and abhor,
but I love Your law.[†]

¹⁶⁵ Very great peace have those who love Your law.[†]
nothing can make them stumble.

¹⁷⁴ Watchfully waiting for Your salvation, O LORD;
what great delight is Your Torah[†] to me!

Meditation:

“Torah Part 1 - Overview”

¹⁸ Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your Torah[†].

Torah translated usually as Law, Word (Hummel) and even as Gospel, forms the strand of thought that runs as a thread through the entire psalm. It is also possible to translate it as story, or telling, or telling of the acts of God. (Salvation history - *Heilsgeschichte*) It is the essential idea to which all the other prominent terms attach. So, it is a God creating, promising a rescuer from judgment, bringing Noah through the flood, being with Abraham on the mountain, bringing Israel through Passover, Red Sea, wilderness, unto His mountain, then to the promise land, providing judges and kings, speaking through prophets, then in birth, suffering. death and resurrection. That is Torah in brief, carrying with it promises, precepts, wisdom, and holiness.

Technically it is the first five books of the Bible, but that means it's all the acts and story of God that begins there and continues on (absolute and all together). It is the psalmist's and disciple's great desire to be immersed in it, since it is God working the bringing of eternal life. It is the unfolding of His works. It is the original work holding within it all that is later revealed, seen, and learned. It is God's walking with His people, and His calling and bringing them to walk with Him (endlessly).

¹⁸ Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your Torah[†].

Prayer:

Father in heaven you created us to know you. You made us to know You. To know the good and the true. To walk with you. Lead us to learn Your wisdom that we may share in life and truth through all eternity. Amen

Word – Commandments

- ⁶ As a result I would not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all Your commandments.
- ¹⁰ Bending all my heart I seek You;
let me not wander from Your commandments!
- ¹⁸ Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your law.[†] (Torah/Commandment)
- ¹⁹ Cast off; I am a sojourner on the earth;
hide not Your commandments from me!
- ²¹ Cursed, insolent ones You rebuke;
who wander from Your commandments.
- ³² Discipleship to Your commandments I will pursue,
when You enlarge my heart!
- ³⁵ Enlighten me in the path of Your commandments,
for in it I delight.
- ⁴⁷ finding my delight in your commandments,
which I love.
- ⁴⁸ For I also lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on Your statutes.
- ⁶⁰ Hastening I do not delay
to keep Your commandments.
- ⁶⁶ Instill in me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.
- ⁷³ Joined by Your hands I am made and fashioned –
give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.
- ⁸⁶ Keystones of truth; Your commandments all endure;
but I am persecuted with falsehood; help me!
- ⁹⁶ Limit to all perfection I have seen,
but Your commandment opens out beyond measure.
- ⁹⁸ Much wiser than my enemies Your commandment makes me,
for it is ever with me.
- ¹¹⁵ Out! Away from me you evil-doers;
that I may keep the commandments of my God!
- ¹²⁷ Passionately therefore I treasure Your commandments,
above gold, above fine gold.
- ¹³¹ Rises a sigh from my lips;
because I long for Your commandments.
- ¹⁴³ Sorrow and distress have come upon me;
but Your commandments are my delight.

- ¹⁵¹ Truly, You are near, O LORD
and all Your commandments are trustworthy.
- ¹⁵¹ Quite trustworthy are your commandments O LORD,
Truly You are near.
- ¹⁶⁶ Victorious salvation from You, O LORD, I await,
As I follow Your commandments.
- ¹⁷² Wake, my tongue! – to sing of Your word,
for all Your commandments are righteous!
- ¹⁷⁶ Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – seek Your servant! *
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!

Meditation:

“Commandment – Torah Part 2”

- ¹⁸ Clear-sighted make my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of Your law.[†] (Torah/Commandment)
- ⁹⁶ Limit to all perfection I have seen,
but Your commandment opens out beyond measure.
- ⁹⁸ Much wiser than my enemies Your commandment makes me,
for it is ever with me.

There are very few verses in the psalm where commandment is singular. The other usages are in the plural. So, what is that? There are essentially two possibilities. One is Exodus 20:2. The other is our first commandment “You shall have no other God’s before Me.” In favor of our first commandment is the teaching that all commandments are bound up in the first one, so that if that one is kept, all others are kept. Again, all the commandments of the second table of the law are bound up in the fourth commandment “Honor your father and your mother.”

I want to look down the other path and see what is there. Exodus 20:2 “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” as the head of the commandments and some say the first commandment. I will focus my meditation on that.

There are 613 commandments in the first five books of the Bible where God says either “you shall” (positive) or “you shall not” (negative). Our catechism, together with the rabbis, divide the commandments into positive and negative, with 248 positive and 365 negative. There is one that stands alone as neither positive nor negative. “I am the Lord your God who brought you out . . .” Some have argued that it is a preamble to the first commandment, and in that way is positive. I would argue that it is after the order of call and response. It is the first word of God in the commandments, from God to which all the rest are responses, or a call to respond.

So, Exodus 20:1 “And God spoke all these words . . .” That takes the translation of Torah and sets it in terms of Word. All the things associated with Word come into play in various places. It is a revelation and as one professor said, He tells them in the first word who He is, and then he tells them who they are. As neither positive nor negative it stands alone. The rabbis do by default call it positive, but that’s almost too easy, and the stand-alone aspect of it makes it unique among all of them. Indeed, Luther follows this in his teaching of the commandments’ five great themes. Where the first commandment is faith, the second prayer, the third rest, the fourth through tenth love, as in the neighbor.

This then is the head of them all, and is the theme of Grace, namely God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense G-R-A-C-E. So as the beginning that latches on to the aspect of Torah that is translated in the word “Word”, it also fits well with the book of John, “In the beginning was the Word . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” He is the beginning of the revelation if you will. “The light shining in the darkness, but the darkness has neither comprehended nor mastered it.” There are things about Him that neither human nor angelic mind can grasp and comprehend. This is the beginning of an eternity of revelation and continued revelation. He will not be constrained but will be that new beginning around which all other things must conform, be put in place. So back to the phrasing, “Make me clear eyed that I may see wondrous things from Your Torah (Commandment).” (Psalm 119:18) Among the most wondrous being the incarnation.

As at the beginning, so with the new beginning, there is embodied in the one all those things that are later to be unfolded and revealed. It is the Word that creates, that forms reality. And of the wondrous things to see in this “commandment/declaration of grace” is that I am called to be brought out and then to walk with God through eternity. That is the same call as was to Adam and Eve, being called at creation to walk with God; and Israel being called out again, and again, to walk with God. The consistent pattern is part of a confirmation of this being a call and invitation. The response is an affirmative, embodied in the Commandments and covenant. In the New Testament the response is an affirmative embodied in the walk of discipleship.

Prayer:

Lord, You have called me to be, and in being to know You, to know the good and the true, and to learn Your Word and promises, and how Your Word expands out to eternity. Make me clear eyed so that as I see, read, and hear Your Word, I may know what You are giving through it. Make me hear how You called me to come out and walk with You. Though my mind is limited, teach me Your Word and make me grow without end in knowing You more and more, so that I may find eternity in Your Word as You reveal Yourself. Amen

Meditation:

“Torah Part 3 – The First Table of the Law”

³⁴ Educate me, that I may keep Your law[†]
and observe it with my whole heart.

⁴⁴ Faithfully, then. I will keep Your law[†]
forever and ever.

Meditation:

As one professor said in the words from Sinai, in the first word He tells them who He is, “I am the Lord Your God who brought You out.” With the second word He begins to tell them who they are. How many places in the Bible do you find that pattern. “I am .. you are.” or “I will ... you will.” One of the most familiar is Psalm 50:15 “Call on Me in the day of trouble and I will rescue you, and you will praise Me.” And then we show who we are by what we do.

So, in the giving of the words from Sinai the first part is about a relationship that He forms with us: 1) He begins with His acts “Who brought you out”; 2) your interpretation of these first two words could be “I am all the God you need.” (No distorted human forms, no images of half human half crocodile, not any of that stuff.) He is all the God we need, and He does not need carved wood or cast metal to be real and in our lives.

The Second Commandment strengthened the relationship by giving us the power of prayer. That power is not to move mountains, it is to talk to the One who moves mountains and parts seas, who raises the dead and calls those things that are not as though they are (creator, redeemer, sanctifier, holy fire).

With the Third Commandment I began to ask Bible Studies and Confirmation Classes, “What is the purpose of the Sabbath Day from God’s side?” A lot of people talk about it from our side and how we should spend it. I would rather ask about it from God’s side. The answer is simple. He comes walking in the garden in the cool of the day to spend time with Adam and Eve His friends. He finds that they have abandoned Him and run off after somebody else, and He must wait a very long time and do a lot to redeem the Sabbath. (Finally in Revelation 21)

Again, He came to spend time with His friends, companions, and to walk with them in this wonderful new world. On the way to it there are prophets and kings, a baby born, and the Son of God who finished His work on a Friday and was wrapped in a cloth and laid in a tomb for the Sabbath of all Sabbaths. Finally, in Revelation 21, He speaks from the throne and says triumphantly, “Now, the dwelling of God is with man.” He will have His Sabbath and invites our whole race to join Him and be a part of it. So comes the conclusion of the first Table of the Law.

Prayer:

So often, heavenly Father, we think of heaven related to our desire. We desire to rise, to live forever, to have bodies restored, all our weaknesses gone, all our illnesses healed, to be reunited with loved ones. Help us to hear, to be reminded and to learn that before any of that It is Your great desire to have us with You and to have Your dwelling among us. Thank you for that truth. Help us to respond and desire to be with you and have you with us. Amen.

Meditation Torah Part 4: “Two-Way Commandments – Relationship Commandments”

- ²⁹ Deceitful ways put far from me
and graciously teach me Your law![†]
- ³⁴ Educate me, that I may keep Your law[†]
and observe it with my whole heart.
- ⁷² Incomparably more precious to me is the law[†] from Your mouth
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

The middle part of the 10 commandments is focused on relationships. They’ve been called the two-way commandments (parents/children, you/your neighbor, husband/wife, boss/employee, master/servant). How do you love your fellow man? These relationships work two ways. So, teaching the fourth commandment includes teaching what are commands to parents; (Deuteronomy 6:7 “These commandments, impress them on your children.”) and sayings about how masters should treat their servants as Paul does in his epistles. They are under obligation. The parent, employer and master are called to serve God in their relationships, as well as the child, employee, and servant (two – way).

Another aspect of this middle part is the difference between borderline and center, on the edge and at the heart, especially the fifth, sixth and seventh commandment. At the edge are prohibitions that a society dare not disregard. If these are disregarded a society goes heedlessly beyond. It cannot long survive. That is the edge. But at the heart, ask what does God truly want? What is near and dear to Him? This is the same as Luther’s distinction “We should not . . .; but . . .” In the fifth commandment we should not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body but help and befriend him in every physical need. The heart of the commandment, what God truly wants, consistently is the part after the word “but.” Consistently after the word “but” is the positive, the will of God. God calls us to help and befriend our neighbor; husband and wife love and honor each other; help (your neighbor) improve and protect his property and living.

As we began, so we continue to ask, how shall we serve God and our neighbor? The prophets had a lot to say about this, because if your neighbor is made in God’s image, how you treat your neighbor is part of your relationship with God.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, You made us of one race, and You bind us together in our relationships. Guide us that we may learn from Your love and teaching how to care for and love our neighbor. Guide us that as we see them made in Your image, we also may grow in living in Your image. Amen.

Meditation: **“Overview & Torah Part 5”**

First an Overview. Picture the giving of the law at Sinai. There is a drama in multiple acts:

Act 1) God calls Moses to come up and tells the people to make themselves ready for the next day.

Act 2) The 10 Commandments.

Act 3) Ordinances - how their life is to be ordered) mostly ending with “I am the Lord Your God.” or “I am the Lord. You shall have no other gods.”

Act 4) Statutes - how to live in different situations.

Torah Part 4 is the last third of the 10 Commandments (the Decalog). It is about testifying to the truth (whether it is for or against you) and contentment.

I find Psalm 16 very helpful. In this psalm David reflects back on his life. It has involved fleeing from Saul, sleeping in caves, always on the move, not knowing whether he will wake up in the morning or be discovered during the night and not wake up, and seeking refuge among Israel’s enemies, pretending to be insane. But he summarizes “the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.”

There are many parts of life that we do not know, the reason and logical cause for or what we have learned and can carry forth from it. As with David, it is for us a statement of faith to say, “The lines have fallen in pleasant places.” But that is a good confession of faith. Everything I have been through, whether good or bad, beautiful or horrible, is part of my path with God. It is not anybody else’s and I would not trade it because it has been my path with God, and it is good. It is good because He is good. Because He is good, it is a path of (eternal) life.

“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places” calls to mind the image of dividing the land (after the conquest) by lottery. When you drew your allotment, you did not know whether the lines would be in rugged, barren places or in good, well-watered soil. You still do not know for the remainder of your life. So, it is a confession of faith “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” Continuing that quote, “I have a goodly inheritance.”

We end the 10 Commandments as we began, with God’s grace, and faith to receive the blessings He gives.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, You created us and bound us together as your children. Teach us by Your Word how to care for each other and how to bring Your blessings to each other. Guide us by Your Spirit to live as Your children that we may shine Your light in this world and care for our neighbor in both physical and spiritual needs. Amen.

Word – Mercy

⁷⁷ Judge that Your mercy may come – that I may live;
for Your law[†] is my delight.

¹⁵⁶ Unequaled is Your mercy, O LORD;
give me life according to Your just decrees.

Meditation, Torah Part 7:

“Mercy”

I try not to repeat when writing but this should be useful. Several pages back I summarized the giving of the law as a drama in several acts. Act 1: when they arrive at Sinai God calls Moses up the mountain and tells Israel to prepare. Act 2: the Decalogue (10 Commandments) and begins with I am the Lord Your God who brought you out. He tells them who He is and then who they are. Act 3: Ordinances (how He will order their life as His people) Each ordinance ends with “I am the Lord” or “You shall have no other god.” Act 4: Statutes (regulating their life as a community and nation).

To our point, (mercy) both ordinances and statutes finish with the same command, “You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” (Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26)

The Bible references how God builds the idea of mercy into His creation. The picture of mercy is the compassion a mother has for her baby, either newborn or still within her womb. It is there, in humanity as well as in the natural world (in the animal kingdom.) Isaiah 49:15-16 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.” When Isaiah says “engraved on the palms of my hands” he brings this home to the place of mercy, Calvary and the cross.

Mercy! We live in a world so often governed by nothing but brute force, without limit. Do whatever you can to your neighbor, take his property, kill, enslave, etc. The Nazi’s built much of their thought around “the will to power.” They said the best of mankind were those who had the will to impose their will. The Bible and Christianity has an answer, and it comes in one word: mercy. In the face of a whole world where the ones who rule are the strong and quick, the ruthless and rich, we stand and we say, “No, no. That’s not it. It is mercy.”

Illustrations:

- 1) A firefighter walks back into a burning nursing home. He searches and finds an old lady, afraid and in her room. He picks her up and carries her out. In doing so he risks his own

life. To many it makes no sense. She has only a few months anyway. To us, it is mercy. It is important.

- 2) You are young and energetic, and there comes a day when all your friends are going out to the latest great movie. There will be a party afterwards with snacks. There might even be beer. Oh, the fun. And then your mom comes to you and says, we need you to sit with Grandma tonight. Just sit with her so she knows someone is there. Will you give up this evening you have been waiting for, for months. It will be a sacrifice. It is mercy. It is important.
- 3) The doctor comes to a young lady expecting a baby. He says, I have bad news for you. Your baby has a problem. She will not grow up tall and strong. She will need to be cared for her whole life. You will carry this burden the rest of yours. I advise you to have an abortion. The young lady says, "No. I am a Christian. That is not what we do." For many people this is completely ridiculous and stupid. To us it is mercy. It is important.
- 4) It's in the movie "Volcano", about a volcano erupting under the city of Los Angeles. There are earthquakes. There is molten lava shooting all over the place, chaos. And then there is a subway train stuck. The lava is rising. Everybody is in danger. And then ahead of them on the path to safety, the lava rolls through and sits there. There is an Italian fireman (who looks for all the world like my friend Andy) who picks up a woman and begins to carry her out of the subway car and walking down the tracks he carries her. He lifts her up. She is now the height of his head. He continues to walk toward the lava. He begins to pray (a Roman Catholic prayer) and then one, two, three steps into the lava he walks with his last strength he begins his prayer again and then throws her over the lava. She is caught by those on the side, watching. Completely ridiculous movie script? Mercy.

What I want you to know is, that over the next years of your life, the most important thing you do is not how much you achieve, how far you go, what travels you can do, how many possessions and friends and how much money you can accumulate. It is often something completely unnoticed. It is often a little act of kindness and compassion shown to somebody who is weak (sick, suffering, lonely). It might be that no other human being ever knows about it. But an act of mercy may be the most important thing you do in those years.

This is our one-word answer to all those filled with pride in their own strength and importance and treating others with cruelty. It is mercy. It is from the cross and given to us. It has been carried into the whole world and everywhere it has gone it has changed things. It is part of who God is and what He does. It is shown in the marks in Jesus' hands. Wherever in the world it is brought by the people of Jesus, it changes people. It changes people's lives in their souls, even to prison camps under communists and concentration camps under Nazis: mercy shines like a bright light in a world of darkness. And God makes it impossible for the world to not see it.

Prayer:

God my God. Help me to see mercy all through Your word. Help me to see it in how the law leaves off and makes me hunger for a Savior. Help me to see it where the law names it as a

last commandment in one section after another. Help me to see it where the prophets and psalms describe it in the natural world. Help me to follow their guidance and see it fulfilled in the palms of Jesus. Help me to see it in the acts of mercy by Your people. Help me to see the opportunities for mercy in my life. And when You guide me to show mercy, help me to treasure those times, not as a little thing, but as a great fulfillment of who I am as Your child. Guide me into acts of mercy. Amen.

Word – Promise

- ¹¹ Buried deep in my heart I hold Your promise,
that I might not sin against You.
- ³⁸ Establish for Your servant Your promise,
which is for those who fear You.
- ⁴¹ For me also, O LORD, let Your covenant mercies be shown,
Your salvation according to Your promise;
- ⁵⁰ Ground of comfort in my affliction is this,
that Your promise gives me life.
- ⁵⁸ How I entreat Your favor with all my heart!
Be gracious to me according to Your promise.
- ⁷⁶ Justifying mercies of Your covenant, send to comfort me;
according to Your promise to Your servant.
- ⁸² Keeping watch for Your promise, my eyes long.
I ask, “When will You comfort me?”
- ¹¹⁶ On Your promise establish me, that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!
- ¹²³ Pining away for Your salvation are my eyes,
and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.
- ¹³³ Regulate my footsteps according to Your promise;
let not any iniquity get mastery over me.
- ¹⁴⁰ Smelter-tested is Your promise,
and Your servant loves it.
- ¹⁴⁸ Though night watches pass, my eyes are awake
that I may meditate on Your promise.
- ¹⁴⁸ Quietly night watches pass, my eyes waken;
that I may meditate on Your promise.
- ¹⁵⁴ Undertake my cause and redeem me;
give me life according to Your promise.

Meditation: **“Promise”**

- ¹¹ Buried deep in my heart I hold Your promise,
that I might not sin against You.

The word promise immediately calls to mind the word prophecy, and questions about the word prophecy. The larger question is, “is there prophecy.” The smaller question is, “is a prophecy rectilinear, with only one verse of prophecy to only one verse of fulfillment, or is it more complicated?” This brings to mind a strategic argument I used for years. It sounds like it

concedes everything to those who doubt the Bible, but then shifts the tables completely. The argument went like this:

There is no such thing as true prophecy in the Old Testament, but it's not what you think. Of false promises there are a ton. For example, He stops by the crossroad. He has the sheep disemboweled and the scryer looks at the intestines and tells him whether to turn right or left. The believers in other gods were trying to discern from nature where the good omens were. The prophets mock that. But the reason there is no true prophecy in the Old Testament is that something entirely different is happening. My best example is in Zachariah 11. There God says to Zachariah, "Take the thirty pieces of silver, the hansom price at which they priced me, and throw it to the potter in the temple." This is usually taken as a prophecy, but it is much more powerful. By the way, it is interesting to note the expressions of hope in those who question the Bible when I would begin this argumentation, and then the crushing look of defeat later on. The thirty pieces of silver does refer to the price of betrayal. But:

We are like a caterpillar crawling along a branch. We may look ahead. Even for that our vision is not that good. We may even remember a little from before, but God looks at us from above. He sees the whole thing, where we were, where we are, and where we will be. And for Him it is all present because He has been there, and He will be. In confirmation class we were discussing the characteristics of God. We touched on omnipresent. He is everywhere, so He sees us wherever we are and knows how to care for us. Then we discussed eternal. There we hit on a word that we made up. It is not only that God has always been and will always be. I believe it is Wayne who used the word first and he said, "He is everywhen" – at the same time through all time. God speaks to Zachariah and tells him what for Zachariah will be, but for God, He has already lived it. The verse is actually past tense. "The hansom price at which they priced me." I describe it as the Holy Spirit taking His Greek New Testament in His left hand, and the pen of the prophets in His right hand, and writing the Old Testament.

So, it is different from prophecy. It is not looking forward and predicting. That would include having to make sure it happened. It is reporting back in time what has already happened for God. Under that definition, can an Old Testament "prophecy" ever fail? It cannot because it is simply reporting back in time what is already established fact. It is like a Cubs fan receiving in February of 2016 a newspaper from the day after the World Series in October of 2016. Is it prophecy for him to tell others, "The Cubs will win it this year"? No, it is not. It is simply he has advanced notice in that newspaper. So, believers in the Old Testament had their New Testament newspapers and could tell others, "This is what will happen." They were not prophesying. They were simply reading the report from the day after. Could those things ever fail to come about? Certainly not! At which point the expression of those who were arguing against the truth of the Bible absolutely crashed. (Sometimes during a sermon I will lift up my Bible and say, "I looked ahead and read the last chapter.")

Remember this, this next year when you hear predictions about who is going to win this or that championship, we have something far better. We have a God who already knows and lives at the end and (psst) lets us in on the secret.

Can God's promises ever fail? They cannot because He lives at the total fulfillment, as well as at the giving of the promise. (Everywhen) We slog through doubts and fears, distractions and detours, and it's like imagining Him when we get to heaven saying, " 'bout time you got here. Been waiting." And we realize right then that He has had it covered the whole time. Prophecy, if you wish to call it that, "promise" includes the guarantee. It is walking with God who already sees and knows, and it is sweet.

Through it all
Through it all
I've learned to trust in Jesus
I've learned to trust in God

Through it all
Through it all
I've learned to depend upon His Word
(Andrae Crouch)

Thank you to Bonnie, who just on a whim started to sing this on a Sunday morning.

Prayer:

Thank You God, my Friend. You give Your promises. They are guarantees of what will come. In the same way, they were guarantees of the fulfillment to the people of old, before Jesus was born. They are part of how You are present right now (along the way and through it all). Help me to remember and hold on to Your promises. Help me to treasure them in my times of uncertainty and in my times of blessing. Amen.

Word – Righteous/Holiness

- ⁷ Acclaim You with an upright heart, I will
as I learn Your righteous ordinances.
- ⁴⁰ Earnestly, I long for Your precepts;
in Your righteousness give me life!
- ⁶² Harkening at midnight I rise to praise You,
because of Your righteous ordinances.
- ¹⁰⁶ Noble the oath I have sworn; and confirmed –
to observe the ordinances of Your righteousness.
- ¹²³ Pining away for Your salvation are my eyes,
and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.
- ¹³⁷ Singularly righteous are You, O LORD,
and upright are Your judgments,
- ¹³⁸ setting forth Your testimonies in righteousness;
and in all faithfulness.
- ¹⁴² Standing righteous forever is Your righteousness,
and Your law[†] is true.
- ¹⁴⁴ Set forever, Your testimonies are righteous,
give me understanding that I may live.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ultimate truth is the sum of Your word,
and forever are all the decrees of Your righteousness.
- ¹⁶⁴ Venerating You, seven times a day I praise
for Your just and righteous decrees.
- ¹⁷² Wake, my tongue! – to sing of Your word,
for all Your commandments are righteous!

Meditation:

Holy Holy Holy

Thinking of righteousness/holiness, immediately Isaiah 6 comes to mind. There the Seraphim call out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy.” It is the Trishagion (three holies). As Isaiah receives his call to be a prophet, the angel takes a coal (wood, the stuff of the sacrifice) from the altar (the place of the sacrifice, Calvary) and puts it on Isaiah’s lips. (And now you have the cross on your lips. Go and preach.)

(It strikes me that I may have been pronouncing this wrong all along. Instead of the middle of the word sounding like sage as in wiseman or spice, could it not be tris rhyming with Chris or Swiss - trishagion.)

In thinking through the threefold Holy, it leads to a very different “take” on the Trishagion.

It's usually assumed that the three holies are references to the three persons of the Trinity, but how about this. The first Holy is a negative holy. There is no fault, no inequality, no biased respecter of persons, no failure on the part of God, but complete perfection in what is right. By the way this holiness would then also be reflected and shown in the angels who did not fall into sin but kept their place and were confirmed in holiness, and the saints in heaven who are now confirmed in holiness and are unable to sin. Thus, the first holy.

Number two, the second holy. The second Holiness is a positive aspect, rather than without flaw or weakness (negative), all things done right and pure (positive). This holiness leaves man behind at any point in his life whatsoever. It is true fulfilling of holiness and fulfilling of all the commandments. The angels may be said to have this in their obedience to God (doing all that is right). In addition, Jesus not only avoids sinning, but fulfills the law in every respect, every stroke and letter: perfect in prayer, worship, obedience, and faith. But there is still the third.

Number three, the third Holy, is beyond the angels, and beyond the saints in heaven. It is holiness that only God has. It is the holiness that Luther describes "The holiness of God is that by which He makes us holy." (So also, righteousness, purity, wisdom) It is beyond the angels, and they gaze in wonder at it. It is described in the book of Romans in answer to the question, what has Abraham found? In answer is the verse "God Who makes sinners holy." It is the holiness that is able to "holify" us sinners.

"Well there's something you don't see everyday Chauncy."

"What's that Edgar?"

"A holiness that is able to holify others."

(Chauncy and Edgar are a two headed monster on Saturday morning cartoons, where the heads talk to each other.)

So, Isaiah receives the stuff of sacrifice from the place of sacrifice on his lips and heads out to preach. In my mind it is one of the sweetest pictures of prophetic commissioning in the whole Bible. (You might decide not to include this part.) He'll need that for his life, especially the end. Apparently, he dies by being sawn in two.

Prayer:

Oh God, my God, teach me to know Your holiness. It is so far beyond, being without flaw or failing, bias or injustice, beyond falling short or lack of anything. Your holiness is also beyond the perfection of all that is right; beyond the simple truth and goodness; beyond the perfection of the law. So that when Your Son goes to Jerusalem, He is not only the spotless lamb without sin or failing. He is not only bringing the perfection of faith, obedience, goodness, and love. He brings a holiness beyond holiness, the holy of holies.

Human ideas of holiness are what human minds and religions create, but this holiness that You send, and He brings, it is the only holiness that is enough for me a sinner, already in sin

and already condemned by the law. It is the holiness that makes holy, that I may turn to Him and be rescued. May I know that holiness. It is the one thing, the perfect gem that You give, that I may live and not perish. It is the holiness that "holifies" sanctifies the sinner; the holiness that does not destroy the sinner but renews and transforms one like me. So even as Isaiah, may I carry that cross and that holiness on my lips that others may see, hear, and be renewed and have life; and that I may live and praise You without end. Amen.

Word – Judgment(s)

- ⁶⁶ Instill in me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.
- ⁷⁵ Judgments of Yours, O LORD; I know are right;
and that in faithful care You have afflicted me.
- ⁸⁴ Know the days of Your servant! How long?
When will You bring my persecutors to judgment?
- ¹²⁰ Overwhelmed is my flesh with awe of You;
and Your judgments I revere.
- ¹³² Return to me with Your grace;
with judgments favoring those who love Your name.
- ¹³⁷ Singularly righteous are You, O LORD,
and upright are Your judgments,
- ¹⁴⁹ Take heed to my voice according to Your covenant mercies;
O LORD, by Your favorable judgment preserve me.
- ¹⁴⁹ Quest O LORD, search out my voice;
by Your covenant mercies and Your favorable judgment preserve me.

Meditation: “Judgment”

- ⁷⁵ Judgments of Yours, O LORD; I know are right;
and that in faithful care You have afflicted me.

This one is hard, difficult for the disciple. There is a section in Hebrews 12 that talks about God’s discipline. It starts out with “we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us according to their wisdom and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.”

He trains us in the practice of faith, that means to believe Him and trust Him in His promises, in spite of and through the times we do not see or feel hardly any benefits and blessings. When the heavens seem closed and it feels like God refuses to hear, it means to know His faithfulness no matter what – and the “no matter what” can be pretty big. The ultimate is Jesus who had to endure the cross. When there was darkness, pain, the judgement of the law, and the devil’s mocking, His middle prayer was “My God, my God why have You forsaken me?” Those around Him said, “Where is Your God now?” and “If He wants Him, let Him save Him if He delights in Him.” (And before, it was “Tell us prophet. Who hit you har har.”) Christians still face that kind of mockery, so the verse makes sense “Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of (our) faith.”

Body builders know about isolating muscles. When only a specific set of muscles are used it puts more stress on them. Here is the isolation of faith. It is one thing to point to somebody else and say, "righteous judgments." It is totally different to talk about "righteous judgments" when the law seems to have turned on you and God sits in judgment and ignores "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani." It is the total commitment of faith and only One has been able to go all the way there.

For five-hundred years this "Strange Righteousness of God" has been the subject of preaching the heart of "What God does to make us righteous." the "Theology of the Cross." Well done those who have pointed out that the signs of Judgment Day are all there: earthquake, darkness, rending of the temple curtain. Jesus makes it judgment Day by taking all the sins of all of us and standing under the law before His Father to be judged. He makes Himself "the Man of Sin" holding it all and being judged for every bit.

There's a Greek word *Pantokrator*, Παντοκράτωρ which is often rendered in English as Almighty. It is thought of in the Greek mindset as "Judge of All People." He is the One who has the right to judge any and all action, motive and person, and His judgment is absolute.

Then comes the bigger question, do we obey and say He is righteous: 1) because He is "big" and "powerful" enough to enforce His judgments, or 2) because He really does have it right; what is good and right and true? The second one seems on the surface to evaluate (judge?) God. Actually, it is a confession of faith. He has convinced me, and I am persuaded. I have read His words. I have read of His acts. He has won my heart. I find in Him, One who stands completely above all other efforts of finding the right and true. I read the Gospel of John and find in Him One who says and does things that neither His followers, nor His enemies understand. He sits and talks with the Rabbi Nicodemus and the wretched woman at the well. Both are discomfited because He is the One who looks them in the eye and tells them what is in their soul. Who tells them answers to things they have not figured out how to ask. They only know they have that question when He begins to answer it.

He is the One who kneels before His disciples to wash their feet; who tells Governor Pilot "You have no power over me" as He readies Himself to go to the cross; who has to help the disciples out of their confusion on Easter; and who then calls His disciples to breakfast on the beach in the morning where nothing amazes, it is simply breakfast because He is spending that time with them. This is how He has judged that He will spend the hours and the days. I am amazed. What can I do but confess? I do not deserve it, but You are righteous, and if you have judged that I should be blessed, I will bow my head and accept Your goodness.

Prayer:

Oh, my heavenly Father when I hear of righteous judgment I am filled with fear. My conscious yells and accuses that I have broken Your laws and have turned in on myself. I have no defense. The law's list is endless. The accuser mocks that I should be thrown away forever. And it is all true. How do I stand before You?

But You have sent the One, Your Son. He has carried my sin, and He has carried me, the sinner. He is the righteous One. The law's list ends, and it calls out that this one is holy and he should live forever. The accuser's accusations are thrown back in his face, and Jesus says, "No! This one is Mine!" He is the holy One, and His holiness is the guarantee, no more fear and no more separation. His holiness is the holiness that takes sinners (like me) and makes them holy. How do I thank You? "In my forgiveness and new life, claims His own victory." ("The Living Lord Sits Down with Us." Rev. Mark Willig, 2016) Once again then: how do I praise Him? By rising and living forever.

This then is Your righteous judgment. Thank You. Amen

Words – Testimonies

- ² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
who seek Him with their whole heart.
- ¹⁴ Blissful, I exult in the way of Your testimonies
as over all riches.
- ²² Contempt and scorn take away from me,
for Your testimonies I have kept.
- ²⁴ Cherished indeed are Your testimonies to me;
they are my counselors.
- ³¹ Devotedly I cling to Your testimonies, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame!
- ³⁶ Endear my heart to Your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain.
- ⁴⁶ Freely I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings
and shall not be put to shame,
- ⁵⁹ Heeding my way,
I turn my feet to Your testimonies.
- ⁷⁹ Justified ones who fear You; let them turn to me;
that they may know Your testimonies.
- ⁸⁸ Keep me in Your covenant mercies and give me life.
So I also may keep the testimonies of Your mouth.
- ⁹⁵ Lying in wait to destroy me are the wicked;
but I diligently consider Your testimonies.
- ⁹⁹ More understanding I have than all my teachers,
for Your testimonies are my meditation.
- ¹¹¹ Noble heritage forever are Your testimonies to me,
yes, they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹⁹ Out, like dross You discard all the wicked of the earth;
therefore, I treasure Your testimonies.
- ¹²⁵ Perceptiveness give me – I am Your servant;
that I may know Your testimonies.
- ¹²⁹ Remarkable are Your testimonies;
therefore my soul holds them close.
- ¹³⁸ setting forth Your testimonies in righteousness;
and in all faithfulness.
- ¹⁴⁴ Set forever, Your testimonies are righteous,
give me understanding that I may live.
- ¹⁴⁶ To You I call; save me
that I may observe Your testimonies.
- ¹⁵² Time out of mind, I have known from Your testimonies

that You have established them forever.

¹⁴⁶ Questing You I call; save me
that I may observe Your testimonies.

¹⁵² Quoting Your words within, I have known
that Your testimonies resound forever.

¹⁵⁷ Unnumbered are my persecutors and adversaries,
but from Your testimonies do not swerve.

¹⁶⁷ Vigilantly my soul keeps Your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.

¹⁶⁸ Vigilantly I keep Your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are open before You.

Meditation: “Testimonies”

As you read through the verses, two ideas form. That of evidence and witnesses. Evidence is inanimate. Witnesses give testimony, telling of evidence.

Significantly through the Bible there is a pattern of two witnesses. Let me list some. When God comes to Abraham outside his tent there are two witnesses (angels) accompanying. On the Mount of Transfiguration there are Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, witnesses to the acts of God from before. There are three witnesses, Peter, James and John, witnessing the current acts of God.. In Solomon’s Temple part of the furnishings of the Holy of Holies are the two cherubim, one on each side of the ark. At the cross there are two witnesses. One on either side. (One is pulled into salvation and eternal life and out the jaws of death and the devil) On Easter in the tomb there are the two angels, one at the head and one at the feet. There are the two evidences, the shroud and the face cloth. There are the two, Peter and John who come to investigate. There are two on the way to Emmaus. And at supper there are two evidences, bread and wine, giving evidence of what accompanies them, the body and blood, evidence to the benefits that we receive, forgiveness, life, and salvation. With the means of grace, there are two accompanying the Word, baptism and the supper. The scripture itself is divided into two testimonies (Old and New). The testament in waiting and the testimony of fulfillment. In eternity the two witnesses will be the angels and the redeemed of humanity. God will have His witnesses, and they (most of them willingly) will testify to His great acts.

The word “testaments/testimonies” runs through the Psalm as the “testimonies” run through history. And we treasure, celebrate, and enjoy the testimonies of these witnesses as we are being given eternity and life.

Prayer:

Oh God, You do not leave Yourself without evidence. You have included the witnesses and their testimony in the whole story of salvation. And what is more, You give us an invitation to call other witnesses. And what is more, You have decided that You will step forward and You

will witness and testify. You will bear witness before all the created about our relationship with You and salvation. Our risen bodies will testify to Your goodness through all eternity. So, in this time of waiting, may we testify to Your goodness as our Savior and our good Shepherd. As the Church of all the saved bears witness in all the world, so that day by day the number of saved may increase as many (the full number of the saved) are brought into life. Amen.

Words – Precepts

- ⁴ Appointed have You, Your precepts
to be kept diligently.
- ¹⁵ Bound to Your precepts I meditate
and I fix my eyes on Your ways.
- ²⁷ Discipleship in Your precepts, make me to understand;
and I will meditate on Your wondrous works.
- ⁴⁰ Earnestly, I long for Your precepts;
in Your righteousness give me life!
- ⁴⁵ Forth, then, shall I walk in liberty,
for I have sought Your precepts.
- ⁵⁶ Given to me has this been;
that I have observed Your precepts.
- ⁶³ Holding to all who fear You, I am a companion
with those who keep Your precepts.
- ⁶⁹ Insolent ones smear me with lies,
but I with my whole heart keep your precepts.
- ⁷⁸ Justly put to shame the insolent; for with guile they have lied about me;
but as for me I will meditate on Your precepts.
- ⁸⁷ Killing me they sought, and almost wiped me from the earth.
But I have not forsaken Your precepts.
- ⁹³ Loath am I to forget Your precepts,
for by them You have given me life.
- ⁹⁴ Liberate me; I am Yours;
for Your precepts I have sought!
- ¹⁰⁰ More than the aged I understand,
for I keep Your precepts.
- ¹⁰⁴ Mentored by Your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
- ¹¹⁰ Nets for me the wicked have laid,
but I do not stray from Your precepts.
- ¹²⁸ Pondering then Your precepts, I direct my steps in all of them;
every false way I hate.
- ¹³⁴ Rescue me from man's oppression;
that I may keep Your precepts.
- ¹⁴¹ Small am I and despised;
but I do not forget Your precepts.
- ¹⁵⁹ Understand how I love Your precepts!
Give me life O LORD according to Your covenant mercies.
- ¹⁶⁸ Vigilantly I keep Your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are open before You.
- ¹⁷³ With Your hand be ready to help me,

Meditation:

“Precepts” – Rev. Ron Friedrich (guest writer)

¹⁷³ With Your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen Your precepts.

Precept is a word that seems to have fallen into disuse in conversational English these days. So what does it mean? More specifically, what does *precept* mean in Psalm 119?

The Hebrew word that gets translated to English as *precept* has as its root a verb, an action word, that is often translated as “visit” – not in the sense of friends having social time together, but rather God dealing with people

- to bless – “The Lord visited Sarah and did as He said.” (Genesis 21:1), or
- to punish – The Lord “visits the iniquity of the fathers...” (Exodus 20:5).

Some versions correctly translate this “visit” sense of the verb as “The Lord will take care of them” one way or another. The picture here is God following through on His commitment, or as we say in our modern idiom, “taking care of business.”

In other contexts, this verb can be translated as “appoint,” as in “Potiphar appointed Joseph over all his house” (Genesis 39:4), in the sense of assigning a task and making someone accountable.

Now comes this same word in the form of a noun in Psalm 119, which we translate as *precept* – taking care of business, His business, following through on the commitments He has appointed for us. The picture that helps me apply this word *precept* to my life in Christ is **agenda**.

Scripture and experience have taught me to begin each day with two prayers:

- (1) “Lord, I am dead. Live your Life through me today. Here is my agenda for the day. Change it as You see fit, or replace it with Your agenda.” (Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:3; Romans 6)
- (2) “Please help me tell someone about Jesus today.” (Acts 1:8)

When I am faithful to start the day with these two prayers, He is faithful in answering them. Amazing things happen.

When I read Psalm 119 and substitute the word *precept* with *agenda*, the Psalm becomes close and personal, especially when I apply the verbs that describe what I am to do with respect to God’s precepts – verbs like:

love, long for, seek, choose,
meditate on, understand,
keep, observe, not forget, not stray from.

Try these substitutions to see how they fit:

- ⁴ Appointed have You, Your agenda
to be kept diligently.
- ¹⁵ Bound to Your agenda I meditate
and I fix my eyes on Your ways.
- ¹¹⁰ Nets for me the wicked have laid,
but I do not stray from Your agenda.
- ¹²⁸ Pondering then Your agenda, I direct my steps in all of them;
every false way I hate.
- ¹⁷³ With Your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen Your agenda.

So, how can we know the agenda God has prepared for each of us? It's quite simple: Consume His Word and stay open to the Holy Spirit's leading in directions you did not plan to go.

The Lord's precepts are much more than just our daily "to-do" list. They are God's guiding hand on all we do and say that reflect His character. Psalm 32:8-9 paints a powerful word picture that illustrates Psalm 119's precepts:

- ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. [ESV]

As with all the key words of Psalm 119, the Lord's precepts give us more than mere information about what God wants us to do. They give us wisdom in the face of life's daily challenges, as the English word *precept* implies. When, how, and whether we apply that wisdom... "Lord, help us!" (Psalm 119:173)

Prayer:

**Lord, I am dead. Live your Life through me today. Here is my agenda for the day. Change it as You see fit, or replace it with Your agenda.
And please help me tell someone about Jesus today.
Amen.**

Meditation:

“Precepts 2”

¹⁴¹Small am I and despised;
but I do not forget Your precepts.

Precepts are statements of wisdom. Ben Franklin said, “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” Elroy Willig, my father, said, “A man’s place on Sunday is standing before His God.” A contestant on a game show said, “Don’t date a man who refuses to tip.” Ann Landers said, “The way a man treats his mother is how he will treat his wife.” Solomon said, “Remember your creator in the days of your youth.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

There is a section of the Old Testament called Wisdom Literature, Job through Ecclesiastes. In English, wisdom is often abstract. Biblical wisdom is practical, dealing with matters of life such as justice, truth, and mercy. Searching those questions calls us back to God and His Word, and that relationship with God is the beginning of wisdom. The psalmist desires that to be part of his life. It is part of his discipleship. Of course, wisdom must be tested. “Wisdom (and foolishness) is proven by her children.” (As in, “you know a tree by its fruits.”)

I spoke a precept to my grandsons recently, “The money you don’t spend becomes power.” It was spoken to those who try to empty their pockets of any and all money within a couple of minutes at the first opportunity, first store. I’m waiting to see if that will guide them into a better wisdom. The prayer that ends the previous devotion (by Rev. Ron Friedrich) is a good precept for pastors and lay people. The precepts of God are endless in their wisdom. They teach us truth, goodness, beauty, wisdom, mercy, and so on.

We live in a world where very often as we reach adulthood we disconnect from family and rush off in foolish pursuit, chasing things with no plan or agenda. Then we spend much of our adult life picking up the pieces. A precept is a statement of wisdom, formulated to guide thoughts. His precepts form how I think about myself, my world, and my fellow human beings. God’s precepts guide my life and can be gone back to again and again. When I accept His precepts as truth and learn from them, then I am not on my own and I grow in wisdom, and He does know from a place of very deep wisdom. Listening does give me a much healthier perspective on things.

So, it becomes a very good thing to meditate on His Word, ponder it, and learn how to apply it. Again, wisdom in the Bible is a practical thing. Keep that book of wisdom handy. Go into it frequently, drink from it and be refreshed.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus my Friend, Shepherd, and teacher, guide me into Your wisdom and precepts. Lead me into Your Word that I may follow it into the many points of wisdom, proverbs, and precepts. And so I grow in the eternal wisdom that brings salvation. Before You I am small. Let me be as the little one, learning from the greatest Teacher of all. And if you will permit it, let it be so, let Your wisdom also be found on my lips that my children, friends, and all around may learn of You. That is true greatness, for You are the greatest of all teachers, shepherds, and friends. Amen.

Words – Ways

- ¹ Absolutely blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law[†] of the LORD.
- ³ Also they do no wickedness,
but walk in His ways.
- ¹⁵ Bound to Your precepts I meditate
and I fix my eyes on Your ways.
- ³⁷ Enjoy my eyes from looking at vain things;
and give me life in Your ways.

Meditation: **“Ways”**

- ³⁷ Enjoy my eyes from looking at vain things;
and give me life in Your ways.

There are a whole lot of people in this world for whom their words are different from their ways. They tell you of great things they are going to do but their life does not fit with their words. They tell you how they are loving, kind, generous and good, but you watch them. Again, their life does not measure up to their words.

There are sayings and precepts. One is “measure a man by how he treats those who won’t ever be able to do anything to help him.” Another is “Don’t date a man who refuses to tip.”

Ways and words can be very different. Not so with God. His ways are creation and salvation, giving life and giving eternal life, and His words match perfectly. He is who He is, and well that is His Name. Some have translated the Name of God as the “Uncreated One”, or “the Eternal.” Maybe we could translate it as “The Genuine One.”

When Jesus is born into this world (poor) this is not “part of the mission.” It is who He is. When Jesus calls out “Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for I am gentle and lowly in heart” this is not a “proclamation.” It is who He is which makes Him in certain ways a riddle. He is the humble God. He is “the lowly God.” Though that may sound odd, it is who He is and why He moves so easily and genuinely among all kinds of people. Would I honestly want any other kind of God? He bursts our illusions about Him. More on this later.

The word “way” stands apart from all the others in that, while you can approach the other words in the abstract or philosophical, way is more concrete. It has to do with spending time together. That is why the first 5 books of the Bible are concrete stories. For example, Israel spends a year at mount Sinai learning the ways of God. Abraham walks with God for many decades, Moses for forty years in the wilderness leading the people. This also holds true in human relationships. Husband and wife may have some idea, ideal of what married life will be,

but when they come together, there are surprises, some little details, others big personality matters. Like when I had to learn that my wife has a pattern of things she will have to do in the morning, every morning, always in the same order. She had to learn that I like to get dirty: digging in the garden, sweeping the basement, sweeping the filth in between the rafters above. I also saved screws, nails, nuts, bolts, tiny little things and every so often I would disappear to the basement for three to six hours sorting them out, by type, length, and gauge. I bought storage containers, each with thirty to forty little sections. I will spread out all over the work bench sorting and then storing them. I don't think it makes much sense to her, but "call it a weakness" (obsession).

The human race has had many years to think about God and try to figure Him out. But we get things wrong. We even convinced ourselves that human sacrifice was a really good idea that he would like. I remember when the mummy of a little girl was found in South America. She grew up in the Inca society. One day her parents took her out to a mountain side to look toward the rising sun, kneel down and pray, and as the sun came over the horizon the priest stood behind her, took his club, and bashed in the back of her skull.

But we get Him wrong still to our day and among religious leaders. Ghandi Ji (so they called him, Ji is an honorific) believed it would be a wonderful thing to stop having marital relations with his wife. (Without desire there would be peace. My wife said it was stupid. I think she's right.) But the human race gets God wrong. The prophets, notably Jeremiah and Ezekiel, have more than just a few surprises. But it wasn't until the incarnation when "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" that we begin to find out more. It took the incarnation to let us understand how wrong we were. Examples: "Come meet a man who told me everything I ever did" (woman at the well); "How can these things be?" (Rabbi Nicodemus); "Let us call down fire from heaven!" (James and John); "Get thee behind me . . . you are not thinking of God's things." (Jesus to Peter); "But we thought he was the Christ" (two disciples on the way to Emmaus talking about Jesus, to Jesus); (at Emmaus) "He was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread and then disappeared from their sight" and Paul on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians hears the words, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Surprises.

All of which calls to mind once again the verse from Revelation 21, "Now the dwelling of God is with man." At the fulfillment when we are together, God and man, some have said that oh yes there will be surprises, but we will not blabber the questions. Everything will be so good that we will simply say "Oh."

Prayer:

Jesus, You are God with us. You came to sit by the rabbi and the woman at the well, to walk with fishermen, to eat with sinners, to be with the poor, the diseased, and those who need You. Walk with me. Turn me from heading my own way. As You have taken hold of so many through the years, take hold of me, change me and make me more and more a disciple, to believe Your promises with faith that grows day by day and do not let up, but remake me until I am remade totally different and completely new. Then as you came to walk with me here, bring me to walk with You there in Your heaven. Amen

Meditation:

“Ways (Part 2) My Servant/Disciple”

³ Also they do no wickedness,
but walk in His ways.

In Isaiah God says, “Behold My Servant” and speaks with love, adoration, and praise. At the baptism, the voice from heaven says, “This is My Son, Whom I love, with Whom I am well pleased.” Then in John 5 Jesus says, “The Father shows all things to the Son, and He will show Him more that you may believe.” Jesus says His message is not His words, but His Father’s words. He says the Son can do nothing except what the Father shows Him. And then some details: as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so the Son, back in the Old Testament the Lord shepherds His people and the “Lord is my Shepherd.”

The language about Father and Son mingles together in both testaments. From John chapter 5 to the end of John, Jesus talks about following, copying, obeying, doing the will of, and learning from the Father. He is the Great Disciple.

At a pastor’s conference we had a speaker who was trained in Israel as a rabbi. He talked about his rabbi (teacher) being a tour guide for his group. They came to a lake. The rabbi said, “let’s go down to the water.” He began to walk there in a wandering zig-zag manner, looking behind to see if his group was following. Then part way there, he stooped down and picked up two pebbles. He examined them closely, then dropped one and put the other in his pocket. He began to meander down to the water again. He asked the group to pull out and show him their pebbles. “What, you have no pebbles? I thought you wanted to practice being disciples.” The disciple learns by copying, patterning, and learning to model his life after his rabbi, his teacher. Such is the language of disciples, and in that Jesus is the Great Disciple. Asked why He healed on the Sabbath He said, “My Father works to this day.”

For the disciple to be like his teacher, it is enough. It is his great desire. When the disciple tells what his teacher does, he is also charting out the path of his learning. Another verse where Jesus talks about discipleship is “Because I live, you will live.” As the teacher, so the disciple. The Old Testament has a rude word for false gods, idols. Galulim combines the letters of animal droppings and the generic Old Testament word for a god. Picture Moses grinding up the golden calf, springling it on the water and making the people drink it. In the days ahead the resting place of the golden calf was behind bushes and rocks, and under trees. (Are you going to worship that?) Then the psalm says, “they who worship them will become like them.” The point is vivid.

The Lamb of God said, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Freely you have received. Freely give.” On Easter He said, “If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven.” Hebrews 12 says, “keeping our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.” Faith is nothing but what He has done first, to perfection, and enduring more than we will ever have to endure. We can trust Him, because He has been there first, and walked it first, and because the

road He walked lead out of death and into glory. Along the way it included walking on water, preaching, healing, and driving out the devil. So, He calls, so we follow. The walk with Him is forever. (We have looked at the end of the book.) It is enough.

Prayer:

Jesus, You are the Great Disciple. There is no one better to teach discipleship than You who have lived discipleship through all of history. Teach me to hear and listen to Your teaching, to study Your works and to learn of Your ways. Let my following be my whole way through this world, and then leaving this world continue on. From the mountain with Abraham (and Isaac), to the Passover Lamb, to the yearly Day of Atonement, You point the teaching and history to Your own work on Calvary. From endlessly different background situations, You call Your people out. Though I am not worthy, continue to lead, teach, and train. Teach me Your care, patience, and ways of reaching others that I may serve in a small way to bring others into life. What's more, help me to understand Your words of life and guide me in Your ways. Amen.

Word

- ⁹ By what means can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to Your word.
- ¹⁶ Boundlessly I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.
- ¹⁷ Charitably deal with Your servant,
that I may live and observe Your word.
- ²⁵ Dejected, my soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to Your word!
- ²⁸ Dissolving for sorrow is my soul;
strengthen me according to Your word!
- ⁴² fittingly, then, I shall answer those who taunt me,
for I trust in Your word.
- ⁴⁹ Guarantee to Your servant Your word,
in which You have made me hope.
- ⁵⁷ Hence therefore, O LORD my portion,
I bind myself to keep Your words.
- ⁶⁵ In goodness You have dealt with your servant,
O LORD, according to your word.
- ⁶⁷ Idly I went astray before I was afflicted,
but now I keep your word.
- ⁷⁴ Joyfully they who fear You will rejoice when they see me;
because I have hoped in Your word.
- ⁸¹ Keeping watch for Your salvation, my soul longs,
yet I hope in Your word.
- ⁸⁹ Long as eternity, O LORD,
Your word stands firm in the heavens.
- ¹⁰¹ My feet I hold back from every evil way,
in order to keep Your word.
- ¹⁰³ Magnificently sweet are Your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth.
- ¹⁰⁵ Now is Your word a lamp for my feet;
and a light to my path.
- ¹⁰⁷ Noisomely afflicted I am,
Give me life, O LORD, according to Your word!
- ¹¹⁴ Over me as a shield and hiding place You are;
I hope in Your word.
- ¹³⁰ Revealing Your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.
- ¹³⁹ Strident zeal consumes me,

because my foes forget Your words.

¹⁴⁷ The first light dawning, I rise and cry for help;
I hope in Your words.

¹⁴⁷ Quickly with the first light dawning, I rise and cry for help;
I hope in Your words.

¹⁵² Quoting Your words within, I have known
that Your testimonies resound forever.

¹⁶⁰ Ultimate truth is the sum of Your word,
and forever are all the decrees of Your righteousness.

¹⁶¹ Void of cause, princes persecute me,
but my heart stands in awe of Your words.

¹⁶² Voicing aloud, I rejoice at Your word
like one who finds great spoil.

¹⁶⁹ Welcome my cry before Your face, O LORD;
give me understanding according to Your word!

¹⁷⁰ Welcome my supplication before Your face,
deliver me according to Your word.

¹⁷² Wake, my tongue! – to sing of Your word,
for all Your commandments are righteous!

Meditation, Word: Silence

- ⁸ Attend to Your statutes I will;
do not forsake me beyond enduring!
- ²⁸ Dissolving for sorrow is my soul;
strengthen me according to Your word!

Sometimes the disciple must walk the road alone, seeking to copy his teacher, silently holding to the teachings and promises. There is a book called Silence by Shusaku Endo. Thank you to Dr. Ji who pointed me to it. It is about a Christian pastor in feudal Japan, tortured, persecuted, imprisoned, and martyred for being a Christian. For no better reason than there was another religion that the government had approved of. (Your Christian religion is a nice religion, a wonderful religion, but a man asks for conflict if he brings a second wife into his house. Therefore Christianity and Christians had to be eradicated for the sake of peace.)

The torture was the pit. It was a pit dug and filled part way with manure. The martyr was wrapped in rope and lowered into the pit, suspended by a second rope only a few inches above the level of the manure. The rope would torture and cramp his body, and it together with the smell would assault his sanity and his faith. Slits were cut above his ears to let the blood out to relieve the pressure so he would not die quickly. It could take weeks. He could very slowly bleed to death while hanging there. He had one hand left free so he could signal that he would renounce his God. If so he would be pulled out, comforted, and set free. Meanwhile there was the silence, and the question "Where is your God?" All it would take was a little hand motion, which in the book he does. The book ends without any other resolution, leaving the question of "silence" to be pondered. I read it in one day and returned it to Dr. Ji. He said how it is a very important book for Christians in Asia. They have a deep seriousness about their faith. There is a day of observance commemorating the martyrs of Japan.

When our Bible study went through the letter of the Hebrews I found and purchased Franz Delitzsch's two volume commentary. He makes a point that not only did Jesus bring the perfect life, He was the spotless lamb of God. He was perfect in His obedience and love of His neighbor. Another professor said, never forget that the cross was also an act of worship. Jesus also brings perfect faith. He goes to the cross with perfect trust and hope. He relinquishes His soul to death, still in the full expectation of life and blessing. That is the perfect faith that trusts the words and promises of God completely and fully, no matter whether the whole rest of the world, circumstances, the inner conscious, the law and commandments, the adversary (devil) and God Himself seem to all combine and condemn to judgment. He went to the place of silence. To the hill of Calvary, and prayed, "My God, My God why have You forsaken me?" Why are you so far . . . silence.

Now there is a different kind of silence. The sterile, medical environment (sometimes with machines beeping). As the body begins to give out, there is still the question of silence. There are pain relievers, pills, treatments, heroic measures, everything taken care of. The body still slowly gives out, and the question of silence hangs in the air. But the disciple answers it the same way, by faith in the words and promises of God. Some talk about the hope that as death approaches, heaven will open and there will be visions of glory. There is the song "Lord, let at last Thine angels come, to Abraham's bosom bear me home, that I may die unfearing. . ."

But what do I expect? For much of life there is silence. Cling to the Word. When death approaches I expect there will be silence. Cling to the promises. Finally when death happens, only then will the silence be broken.

I remember a time in high school when we kids found out we could ride our bikes to church, go in and sit around the altar and talk. We could look up and see Pastor Bacon in his office at his desk working. He would want to go home, so he stayed working. We were kids so we were inconsiderate. It didn't matter what he wanted. If we wanted to stay until 8, 8:30, 9, 10:00 we would. It was a comforting silence. A simple awareness that we were in God's house.

In the 70's there were the books He is There, and He is Not Silent by Frances Schaffer. Frances Schaffer's approach was to attack other belief systems and show they had many more flaws and holes in them than Christianity. I have questions about that strategy. It was exposure to Frances Schaffer that triggered the development of my own apologetic approach. If you were God and you wanted to reveal yourself to the human race, how would you do it? You would need to do it in a way that: 1) called people to faith in you, 2) could be ignored and rejected, 3) could not be duplicated, found elsewhere, or arrived at through logic or philosophy. Three things fit that bill: 1) the record of fulfilled prophecy, 2) the miraculous life and teachings of Jesus, 3) the resurrection.

There is another book. The name of God is not in it. There is no "word from God." In fact God is not mentioned at all, not a single time. It is the book of Esther. In it the people of God are in captivity in Babylon. The villain of the book, Hayman, has set in motion a plan to wipe out every last one of them. But coincidences happen. Through one after another of them, God's people are preserved and the villain destroyed. It is celebrated in Jewish synagogues as the festival of Purim, by laughing, cheering and booing, to drown out the name of the villain. The sweet pastry of the day is the Hamentashen, made in the shape of a three corner hat, because that's what Hayman wore. The deep significance is that even when there seems to be no sign from God, He is still there, sees, hears, acts, and will preserve His people. It is about silence, and how the answer has come and will come from God. Ultimately it is about Calvary and how in Jesus, God speaks out quietly, in a way that resounds through the whole world for the rest of time. And that is why we can have faith.

Again, there is silence. The silence I face down with faith in the words and promises. For a lot of history there has been silence, and the silence broken by the "incarnate Word." He sat with sinners. Listened. Kept company. Didn't always have to speak. Many of His great statements are

very short. "I am." "Be healed." "I am He." "I thirst." He faced temptation with forty days of prayer. We read about His astonishing faith. For Shusaku Endo and the martyrs of Japan, He came to share the silence. He goes to the hill of silence outside Jerusalem. But as He goes into the silence the Christmas song says of Him, "The silent Word is pleading."

As the silent One bears our silence, He becomes the call out from God for us to hear His Word, promise, grace and mercy. In silence this man/God goes into the final silence, becoming the resounding call of life from the living God. And those who hear shall live.

Prayer:

And Jesus my friend, who came to walk among us. You are the Great Disciple, by Your life revealing the Father to us perfectly. You have shown us the way of faith, facing down the tempter through forty days of prayer. You came to our place of silence to bring the blessing to us, and us into the blessing. You continually have our back. And though we do not see it or feel it, You constantly reassert Your will to be ours. Be my teacher. Plant deeply in my soul Your words, promises, precepts, wisdom, and way. Guide me so that I may grow as your disciple here; and then forever. Amen.

Meditation: Silence 2

²⁵ Dejected, my soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to Your word!

Rev. 8:1 And when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about a half an hour.

The previous devotion included the book *Silence* by Shusaku Endo and the struggle of the disciple in the face of silence. Especially the silence of going into death. We learn that Jesus is there, because He went there first, exactly there. He offers Himself to His people, gives His blessing and welcomes us with open arms for our comfort in coming home. In that meditation we looked at the silence of the book of Esther. Unseen by His people, unrealized by His enemies, He works silently behind the scenes, guarding and keeping. Again, we learn this for our comfort. There is one more book that makes a big point of silence. In Revelation, as the Lamb opens the seals, leading us into the future: at the fifth seal the martyrs are gathered and comforted; at the sixth seal the great multitude of all believers, from the first pages of Genesis to the end of the world, are gathered together. It is the celebration that begins and never ends. 8:1 says, "And when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about a half an hour." Many read this as the beginning of the next section; I, as a wonderful conclusion. When God has said all that He has to say, there is nothing left to say.

In Africa there is a saying, the chief speaks last. In a congregation I served, one of the members would speak last. He was prominent, wealthy, and listened to by all. But when he spoke last, he did not seize control of things and take it where he wanted. He gathered together the wisdom of everybody else ("so and so has said . . ."). He was careful. When he finished everybody knew what they had all discussed, agreed on, talked about and wanted to do.

God has the final say, and when He is done, we recognize how good the wisdom sounds and are satisfied.

"I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Then go to sleep at once and in peace." (Luther's Small Catechism, Evening Prayer)

It leads us into a peaceful silence. It is the same on the cross when Jesus prays "Father into Your hands. . ." There follows a peaceful silence, the rending of the curtain in the temple, the opening of tombs, and on the third day the resurrection. So, when we are coming to the end of our lives, there can also be a peaceful silence. God has said what He has to say, we are forgiven, and heaven is ready to open.

Silence is worship. It is a recognition that all has been said, and there is nothing more to say. It is a stopping. To acknowledge that all is complete and completed well and good: so the angels; so all creation; so Rev 8:1, just to push that connection one more time. It is also the conclusion of the Aaronic Benediction, "The Lord look upon you with delight and give you peace." (Yes, that's it "Look upon." Just simply "Look upon.") The Christian at the end says, "Well done, good and faithful God."

The final word for the Christian is, in the silence, "you are my beloved child." In the silence is the silence of the cross. As at the beginning, earned on the cross, given by Jesus, "to the fulfillment of the age." And He says that we are at peace with Him. And there is nothing more to say. It is complete.

Prayer:

It is finished. Lord, let Your silence be my silence. Let Your silence be my peace, leading me into Your rest. Amen.

Word – Seek

- ² Altogether blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
who seek Him with their whole heart.
- ¹⁰ Bending all my heart I seek You;
let me not wander from Your commandments!
- ¹⁵⁵ Unknown to the wicked is salvation,
for they do not seek Your statutes.
- ¹⁷⁶ Wayward I have wandered like a lost sheep – seek Your servant!*
Wherefore I will never forget Your commandments!

Meditation: **“Seek”**

How do sheep stack up as disciples? Not very well. They wander, get lost, tangled, messy, in all kinds of trouble and in danger. They are foolish. They lack a lot in paying attention and following directions. They do not have the ability to call out to their shepherd and get his attention from a distance. But this Shepherd gives to his sheep the right and privilege of prayer and He promises to hear.

Imagine the picture of the sheep standing on a rock stuck between two cliffs. He is stuck. He can't get off either direction. Eventually the rock will slip and he will die. (Baaa) So, the Shepherd searches for the sheep. And as the poster says, leaving the 99 to search for the one makes no sense, until you are the one. So, the Shepherd searches . . . and when He finds (hmmm . . .).



“Well, there you are! This is not a good place. I would give this rock an hour before it slips loose, crashes down and crashes whatever goes with it. But here I am. And you. Let's go. Up you go. (hurr) You've gotten heavy. Let's go. Come on. There's a little rise over there. Come on. Up. Let me get a hold of you. Right hand on your right rear foot. Left hand on your right front foot. Let me get my head under here, and my neck and shoulders. (Urk) That's going to be sore in the morning, but here we are and you're up, and we've a long walk home. So, let's go. Right ... Left ... Right ... Left ... Right. Left. Okay. Come on. Watch for roots and loose stones.”

“Baaaa”

“And you never have been good at conversation, have you? Well, we're on our way. And you are wet and messy and that is soaking through the robe. Wet on my shoulders. Now it is

running down. There are trails of water running down my chest, and back, and arms. Tickles a bit.”

“Baah”

“And here we go. That looks like the path over there. That knee is going to hurt. I’m going to give myself a good soaking. But the soap is going to STING!”

“We’re starting to go down. Whoops, that stone was not stable. That ankle is going to swell. But we’re moving along. Ha ha. Licking the ear. That’s distracting. Sheep don’t drool, do they? Oh yes, they do. So, what do I have running down my chest and back and abdomen and hips now? I got sheep gloop. Running down my cheek, I got sheep spit. Well, at least you haven’t done that other thing. . . Oh yes you did! Yes, you did! It starts out warm and it runs down fast. Boy, is this shepherd going to stink! Keep going. Keep going, right, left, right, left.”

(Sometime later) “There’s home over there. Just a little bit more. Don’t do anything else. You settle down and stay safe. And don’t nibble on the ear.”

(Trudge. Trudge.)

“And here we are. Now I gotta get you down. Okay, down on one knee. Okay, down on both knees. Now bend, and lower and lower and lower and bend and lower and whoops. Face in the ground. Now you want to go. That’s right, just get yourself free. Go ahead, step on the back of my neck. And now run around, run around, jump in the air. Run around. run around, jump in the air. Run around, run around, jump in the air. Somebody’s happy. This is going to take hours and hours to clean. But that’s what having sheep is about. It’s all about sheep gloop.”

(Stands up) “Take a deep breath. COME ON! CELEBRATE! I FOUND MY SHEEP!”

“Baaa.”

Prayer:

Thank You, Good Shepherd, thank You.

- 1. You have given me the right to call. No matter my trouble or situation, I can call. No matter the clamor or confusion surrounding me, I can call. No matter how weak my voice, or faith, I can call. And You have promised to hear.**
- 2. Thank You that You answer. You know my need. You always are able to rescue.**
- 3. You have gone the great distance to search and find me and at great cost You rescue and bring me home.**
- 4. Thank You that - though I misbehave as You rescue me - You are constant and carry it (me) through.**
- 5. Thank You for Your joy, that You delight in my happiness at being safe (saved).**

Amen