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**"We All Want to Be Blessed"  
(Psalm 119:1-8)  
Pastor Peter Yi  
March 5, 2017**

**(Psalm 119:1-8)**

- <sup>1</sup> Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
    who walk according to the law of the Lord.
- <sup>2</sup> Blessed are those who keep his statutes  
    and seek him with all their heart—
- <sup>3</sup> they do no wrong  
    but follow his ways.
- <sup>4</sup> You have laid down precepts  
    that are to be fully obeyed.
- <sup>5</sup> Oh, that my ways were steadfast  
    in obeying your decrees!
- <sup>6</sup> Then I would not be put to shame  
    when I consider all your commands.
- <sup>7</sup> I will praise you with an upright heart  
    as I learn your righteous laws.
- <sup>8</sup> I will obey your decrees;  
    do not utterly forsake me.

This sermon is going to have two introductions. One is a brief introduction on our theme for this year and the other is a short introduction on this Psalm since it has been over a month since we first looked at it.

Here's the first introduction.

Let me remind you again that this year commemorates the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. The Reformation was that great event in history that occurred in Europe that reformed the church. The main church at that time was the Catholic Church and sadly, it had become corrupt. One of the ways it had become corrupt was through the selling of indulgences, which was where parishioners could give an offering to get people out of purgatory and go straight to heaven.

As well, the Catholic Church was in need of Reformation because it had strayed from some of the major doctrines of our faith. To make a long story short, here are some of the major doctrines that were rediscovered during the Reformation. *Sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli Deo Gloria.* Within these five truths we find the core doctrine on which Christianity stands or falls, which is Justification by Faith. Christians agree that this is by far the most important doctrine. Justification by Faith comes from *sola gratia, sola fide* and *solus Christus*. It's the doctrine that tells us how a person is saved, or is made right with God, or how their sins are forgiven. In April, we will have a study on the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, during our Wednesdays in the Word study.

Now, these great and important doctrines are founded in a much more foundational doctrine, and that is *Sola Scriptura*. Protestants, who came out of the Reformation, who protested against the Catholic Church, believed that there is only one sole authority for all matters of life and faith and that is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Catholic Church believes there are two authorities: the Scriptures *and* Tradition. Let's explore this a little bit. We Protestants believe in tradition, there's no doubt about it. In fact we have a rich tradition that goes back 500 years to the Reformation and even further back to the formation of the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Tradition isn't all bad. Tradition may tell us how an order of worship might have gone, or what things we should be teaching Christians, like the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Heidelberg Confession. These are all part of our tradition. But what sets apart our view of tradition from the Catholic view is that we believe that all tradition must be scrutinized by a higher authority, and that is scripture. So for much of this year, we will be camped in Psalm 119 because it is a beautiful psalm on Scripture, on the value and beauty and power of the Word of God...which brings us to the **second introduction**.

Overview of this psalm:

Here's how one scholar writes about this chapter.

"This is a psalm, not only of law, but of love, not only of statute, but of spiritual strength, not only of devotion to precept, but of loyalty to the way of the Lord. The beauty of this psalm resounds from the relationship of the psalmist and his God." (VanGemeren, p.736-37)

This is the direction we want to go in regards to this psalm. We don't want this to be some sort of academic exercise in dissecting an ancient text. Rather, we want to become people who because of our love for God, love the words of God; and in loving the words of God, love God even more.

Next, here are some definitions that'll be helpful to better understand this psalm. The psalm repeatedly uses eight different words for the word of God, and even though there are some areas of overlap, there are also some important nuances in each word. Here are the eight words.

1. "Law, in the broad sense it refers to any "instruction" flowing from the revelation of God as the basis for life and action. In the narrow sense it denotes the Torah"
2. "Word" refers to any kind of divine revelation.
3. "Laws" different from "Law" denotes cases or legal decisions. It's the basis for Israel's legal system.
4. "Statutes" refers specifically to the terms of God's covenant with his people."
5. "Commands" is anything the Lord has ordered.
6. "Decrees" refers to God's royal sovereignty that establishes his divine will.
7. "Precepts" occurs only in Psalms. Appears to be synonymous w/ covenant and with the revelation of God.
8. "Word or promise" denotes anything God has spoken, commanded, or promised."(737-78)

Okay, enough introduction. Let's look at this psalm.

If you remember, this psalm is organized into 22 sections patterned after the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Well, the first section of this psalm acts as an introduction or sets the stage for the rest of this psalm and it begins with the word, "blessed." The word 'bless' does not appear again in this psalm, but it tells us what this chapter is all about. How does a person become blessed? How do we live a life that is blessed?

### **The promise of blessing (1-3)**

The beginning of this psalm is reminiscent of the first psalm. Do you remember how it begins?

- 1:1 Blessed is the one  
    who does not walk in step with the wicked  
    or stand in the way that sinners take  
    or sit in the company of mockers,  
2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
    and who meditates on his law day and night.

Now listen to the first three verses of Psalm 119:

- 119:1 Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
          who walk according to the law of the Lord.  
2      Blessed are those who keep his statutes  
          and seek him with all their heart—  
3      they do no wrong  
          but follow his ways.

We can immediately see the similarities.

The whole psalter, that is, the 150 individual psalms are written in order to show us the life that is blessed by God and Psalm 119 shows us that as well.

So, what is this psalm about? It's about God's glory and our happiness. What we have to figure out as people, whether you are a Christian or not yet a Christian, is the connection between God's glory and my happiness. Everyone wants to be blessed. Everyone wants to be happy. Listen to what the 17<sup>th</sup> century Christian mathematician Blaise Pascal said about this. He writes, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."

I heartily agree with what he said. We all want to be happy, which is another way of saying we all want to be blessed. However, our happiness and God's glory cannot be separated. This is where much of the problems of life start coming in. We think that happiness can be achieved by removing God from the picture.

When we observe modern people, it appears pretty obvious that we all want to be happy. Many modern people think that blessing or happiness comes from free personal expression. In other we are trying to achieve happiness on our own terms. They define first of all what happiness is. Happiness is having a lot of stuff. Happiness is having a great job. Happiness is having perfect children. Happiness is having a boyfriend or girlfriend. But what's missing from all these things is God. Christians believe that because God is the creator of human beings, he's the one who knows what will truly make us happy.

Let's see if this illustration helps. *If you've been to our home recently, you'll know that we have three dogs. I'm a dog-lover and I want to be a good dog owner. So I've watched a ton of Cesar Milan, the Dog Whisperer. He's a dog psychologist. And he says that why there are so many messed up dogs with abnormal behavior is because there are so many messed up dog owners. So what he's doing in his shows is not really fixing dogs, he's fixing people. The dogs featured in his shows go crazy because humans impose traits of humanity onto beings that are not human.*

*As a rational human being, Cesar is taking a step back, and he's trying to get into the mind of a dog, asking, what does a dog want, what does a dog need. As a human being, being more intelligent than a dog, Cesar can observe normal and abnormal dog behavior and comes up with solutions to fix these problems.*

But what about for human beings? Who's the human whisperer? Sure there are some things that we can discern for ourselves regarding what we need or what will make us happy. So when I eat a delicious meal, it makes me happy, it stimulates my senses, and it gives me nutrition. When I'm in healthy relationships it makes me happy. I feel as if I matter to others and the other person matters to me. I feel more whole, more complete. But is that all it takes to find out our purpose and the way to true happiness?



It's also a life that does no wrong and it's a life that follow his ways. There are no halfhearted measures here. We will only experience half-hearted happiness when we go with half-hearted measures. The consistent message of the bible is that God wants us to be "all in". And it's when we settle for half measures that we begin the slide into apathy, idolatry, and sin.

Happiness comes from obeying the laws of God. Repeat ad infinitum!

But, you might have said, I've tried and it's too hard. And you'd be right. So, when we get to verses 4-6 we find the next step.

### **The prayer for blessing (4-6)**

- 4     You have laid down precepts  
          that are to be fully obeyed.  
5     Oh, that my ways were steadfast  
          in obeying your decrees!  
6     Then I would not be put to shame  
          when I consider all your commands.

What we see in these verses is a prayer to receive God's blessings. In verse 4, the psalmist states God's expectations as it relates to the Law. He says that they are to be fully obeyed. Listen to how James in the New Testament says it.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.  
**(James 2:10 NIV11-GK)**

The expectation is clear. Even in the New Testament we are told that the whole law, every law, every detail was meant to be obeyed all the time; and in violating one law, we violate them all. Now consider how difficult that is. What if God gave us just two laws and he said that we are to obey these laws all the time. Would we be able to it? Well he has given us two laws. In fact all the over 600 laws in the bible are summarized into 2. Love God and Love People. Two simple laws, would we be able to do these commands fully even for a day? I don't think we could. But that's the expectation of a holy, pure and just God. So, where do we go from here?

Look at verse 5.

"Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!"

Who's he talking to? He's speaking to God and speaking to God is praying to God.

This is a prayer, asking and pleading with God for help in obeying his commands, which is another way of saying, "Oh that my life would be blessed." To ask God for help in obeying his commands is the same as praying for God to bless you. Listen to that again. To ask God for help in obeying his commands is the same as praying for God to bless you.

Is that how we think? Is that how we pray? Consider a parent or a Sunday school teacher praying for God to bless their child. How might that prayer now look with this new understanding? God, help Johnny to love obeying you. God help little Mary to delight in keeping your commands, and in doing so, be blessed.

Then he prays that Shame would not overtake him. Shame in the OT refers to a state of being abandoned by God. What is implied here is that he is going through some serious issues and troubles. And he asks God to look upon him with mercy.

Friends, no one can fulfill the requirements of God apart from the help of God. That's why we all must pray for God to give us the heart that desires to obey, but also the power and strength to obey. This heart and ability is ours in Christ. Jesus came to remove our old self, filled with sin and rebellion. Before knowing Jesus, we neither had the desire to obey nor the ability. But now, because of Jesus, we who were once far away have been brought near. We who once had hearts of stone, now have hearts of flesh. We who were once rebels have now become children, who not only want to obey God, but are now able to obey God.

Once we receive that power and ability in Christ, then we can confidently echo the words of the psalmist. Look at verses 6-8 with me:

- 6        Then I would not be put to shame  
              when I consider all your commands.
- 7        I will praise you with an upright heart  
              as I learn your righteous laws.
- 8        I will obey your decrees;  
              do not utterly forsake me.

This is the key to blessing that results in bringing glory/praise to God.

Finally, Jesus himself taught us what a blessed life looks like.

- 5:3    "Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
              for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4        Blessed are those who mourn,  
              for they will be comforted.
- 5        Blessed are the meek,  
              for they will inherit the earth.
- 6        Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
              for they will be filled.
- 7        Blessed are the merciful,  
              for they will be shown mercy.
- 8        Blessed are the pure in heart,  
              for they will see God.
- 9        Blessed are the peacemakers,  
              for they will be called children of God.
- 10      Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
              for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

5:11    "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

How can we experience happiness? By doing life God's way, by obeying his commands, through the Gospel, through Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.