

**"The Eternal Word"
(Psalm 119:89-96)
Pastor Peter Yi
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(Psalm 119:89-96)

⁸⁹ Your word, LORD, is eternal;
it stands firm in the heavens.
⁹⁰ Your faithfulness continues through all generations;
you established the earth, and it endures.
⁹¹ Your laws endure to this day,
for all things serve you.
⁹² If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
⁹³ I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have preserved my life.
⁹⁴ Save me, for I am yours;
I have sought out your precepts.
⁹⁵ The wicked are waiting to destroy me,
but I will ponder your statutes.
⁹⁶ To all perfection I see a limit,
but your commands are boundless.

Before we get to the heart of the message, let's look at how this passage is structured. It's pretty clear that verses 89-91 compose one section and it's a confession by the psalmist of the enduring nature of God's word. The next section begins in verse 92 and goes to verse 95. In this part of the passage the psalmist is making statements about what the word has meant to him personally. So, the first section he's confessing what the word is and the second section he confesses his personal experience with the word. The last verse, verse 96, wraps it up, returning to the first idea about the eternal nature of God's word. So, you have these bookends that talk about how God's word is eternal and immovable and unchangeable. Then if you were to move in one verse from each end, from the beginning we move down to verse 92 and then from verse 96, the last verse, you move in from the end to verse 95...both verses 92 and 95 speak about affliction and danger, but it also mentions a deep encounter with the word. In verse 92 he says, the law had been my delight. And in verse 95 he says he will ponder God's statutes.

If we move in one more verse from the bookends, we get to the middle of the passage. So think of it like a sandwich. Verses 89-91 and verse 96 are the two slices of bread. Verses 92 and 95 are two pieces of lettuce. And between the two layers of lettuce are two slices of meat. Look at verse 93 and 94. What's the common theme of those two verses? Salvation. He says in verse 93 that God, by his word, had preserved his life and in verse 94 he says, "Save me, for I am yours."

This is called a chiasm, or a chiastic structure. It's named after the Greek letter 'chi', which looks like an X. What a chiasm in biblical literature does is that it starts from the periphery and moves toward the middle or toward the center. So the themes are introduced on the fringes, but the main point is in the middle, like an upside-down triangle, or like a V. Does that make sense? So, we begin with the enduring and eternal qualities of the Word, then the following point would be the life struggles that we all go through. And finally, and climactically, God saves and delivers according to his promises, according to his word.

Here are the three points I'd like to go with. First, the enduring nature of God's word. Second, We must go to the word during affliction. And third, salvation awaits those who trust in God's word.

The enduring nature of God's word.

- 119:89 Your word, LORD, is eternal;
it stands firm in the heavens.
- 90 Your faithfulness continues through all generations;
you established the earth, and it endures.
- 91 Your laws endure to this day,
for all things serve you.
- 96 To all perfection I see a limit,
but your commands are boundless.

We are living in a time when many Christians no longer believe in the enduring and unchangeable nature of God's word. Even those whom we considered our Christian leaders have capitulated and have forsaken the authority of God's word, or they have become quite ambiguous about the Bible's authority. For example just this past week, the internet was lit up with the story of a very well-known pastor, who has written dozens of books and even translated a very popular paraphrase of the Bible. This pastor has long been retired from pastoral ministry, but has continued to be influential through his books and speaking. So recently, an interviewer asked him if his position on same-sex marriage has changed. He gave a lengthy reply including with the words, "But it's not a right or wrong thing as far as I'm concerned." Then the interviewer asked him this question, "If you were pastoring today and a gay couple in your church who were Christians of good faith asked you to perform their same-sex wedding ceremony, is that something you would do?" To which the renowned pastor answered, "Yes."

There's no way that pastor could have misunderstood that question. Well because he was so popular and respected, his answer lit up the internet this week and Christian after Christian was blogging and writing their responses to this controversy. A day later, the well-known pastor retracted his statement and tried to make it clear that he believes in the historic view of marriage between one man and one woman. I don't know how you can do that, but that's what he did.

Well, one of the people who blogged about this was a pastor friend of mine in Calgary. And the gist of his article was that it didn't really surprise him because he had shown signs of ambiguity on the issue years and years ago when his popular Bible translation came out. The passage he was referring to was Romans 1:26-27 which is one of the six biblical texts that sees homosexuality as a sin. Here's how it reads in the NIV. Please listen carefully.

(Rom 1:26–27) "26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."

Now, listen to the way he translates it in his version:

²⁶ Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. ²⁷ Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches. **(Romans 1:26–27 MESSAGE)**

The blogger drew our attention to the phrase “all lust, no love” as the point where there was great ambiguity. He was saying that what it leaves open is that God is against not homosexual relationships per se, but lustful relationships in general. So as long as you're in a loving relationship and not a lustful one, that's what matters, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. The Presbyterian Church of Canada is now debating this issue. And here's what history has shown. If the issue is up for debate, then it's not a matter of 'if' it will pass, but 'when' it will pass.

Now that's a pretty long illustration, but the point is clear. The biblical definition of marriage has been clear for 4000 years—from the Old Testament to the New Testament and for 2000 years of church history. What will keep you and me and the church from doing the same? What will prevent us from disregarding the scriptures? What will keep us from making the Bible say what we want it to say? We too must have the same confession that the psalmist had. We have to hold deeply to the conviction that the Word of God is the Word of God and will not change.

When we look at the psalmist's confession a bit more closely, we discover some amazing things. He says, “Your word, Lord, is eternal.” Now that is a remarkable statement. How many things in the universe are eternal? Is the earth eternal? Is the universe eternal? Are angels eternal? Are we, human beings, eternal? Is matter eternal? No. All of those things have a beginning. All of them are created things. They are not eternal. They are all finite. Even scientists would agree. Only one thing is eternal—God. God was, God is, and God forever will be. He is the ancient of days, He is the uncreated one, He is the Alpha and the Omega. God alone, existing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is eternal. Then how can the psalmist write that God's words are eternal?

The Word of God is God's self-disclosure, his self-revelation, his self-expression. God's word is the primary means by which God reveals himself, and by which we come to know God. God is spirit. God is invisible. We cannot study him like we would other things like a fish or animal or geology. We don't observe him in his natural environment like a wild animal. We don't place him under a microscope. The way we know God is through the Word of God. Therefore, to know the Word of God is to know God. To ignore the Word is to ignore God. To change the Word is to try and change God. To misinterpret the Word is to misinterpret God. Because God is eternal his word is eternal, and here's another word, God is immutable, which means He cannot change, therefore, God's word cannot change. It remains forever the same.

Listen to how other Bible authors have said it. Peter writes in his first letter,

But the word of the Lord endures forever” and this is the word that was preached to you.
(1Peter 1:25)

Our Lord Jesus Christ says,

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **(Matthew 5:18)**

It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. **(Luke 16:17 NIV11-GK)**

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. **(Revelation 22:18)**

When we look at Jesus' view toward the Scriptures, he didn't question it, he didn't approach it with suspicion, he didn't say, "well that was then, this is now." He viewed the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets, which is a way of referring to all the contents of the Old Testament, as the very words of God, with full authority. Jesus, himself submitted to the entirety of the Old Testament law. In fact, he fully obeyed the laws and commands of the Old Testament.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **(Matthew 5:17)**

In fact, if Jesus did not fully obey the Old Testament as it was meant to be obeyed, then we could not be saved. Not only did our sins need to be atoned for, which he did on the cross, but his perfect righteousness, his perfect obedience, his perfect fulfilling of God's law, was imputed to our account, so that the righteousness of Christ, becomes our own righteousness.

I don't know how I can stress the importance of this. I've said it before and I'll say it again. Every Christian needs to determine in their heart and mind, that this book and the words contained therein are nothing less than the very words of God, unchangeable for all time and for all generations. If that becomes for you a foundational premise here's what will happen.

What will happen is that you will approach the Word with humility. You will say, "Lord, I know this is your infallible word, but this part I don't get, this part I don't know how to understand in light of what's going on in our culture. Please give me understanding and discernment." I know so many Christians who do not have this foundational conviction, so then every sermon, every Bible study is a free for all. Every passage is looked upon with suspicion. You cannot grow as a Christian that way.

Second, you will have great confidence in God and his promises. The Bible is a book filled with the precious promises of God. If you truly believe the Bible, then you'll know that the promises of God are still good for you today. This is another way of saying that you will have greater faith. To have faith in God is to have faith in his word, which are filled with his promises.

One more thing, if you believe in the enduring and unchangeable nature of God's word, you will be a disciple-maker. If you think that there is nothing more precious, more valuable, more helpful than the word of God, then you will share that with others. That's what discipleship is. It's when one Christian helps another Christian know and obey the word of God. How do we know that? Because Jesus himself defined it for us when he said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing...and TEACHING them to obey everything I have commanded."

Parents, there is nothing more important you can do than to see yourself as the first educators of your children, and teach them the Bible. Read the Bible with them. Go through the New City Catechism with them. And for every Christian person here, one of the greatest things that you can do is to make disciples. Just because we focused on discipleship last year, doesn't mean we stop because it's no longer the theme this year. Now, I appreciate all the ministries of our church. I love our welcoming team. I love our worship team. I love the guys who work sound and media. I love people who are great at planning events. Those are all incredible and valuable ministries. If you're serving there, thank you, but please don't let that be a reason not to make disciples. You can't help people how to know and obey God's word by singing songs and playing instruments really well or by greeting people as they walk into church. Please, get involved into some form of making disciples.

That was point one, the word of God is eternal and unchanging.

Second, we must go to the word in our affliction.

- 92 If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
95 The wicked are waiting to destroy me,
but I will ponder your statutes.

Now, I won't say too much about this point because we've looked at this many times already.

Third, salvation awaits those who trust in God's word.

- 93 I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have preserved my life.
94 Save me, for I am yours;
I have sought out your precepts.

These two verses are the highlight of this passage. It's the main point. We can say that the purpose of the Bible is to show humankind how we can be saved. It takes all but three chapters of the Bible before humankind makes a mess of things. Genesis chapter 3 is a pivotal chapter in the storyline of the Bible. It's the chapter where sin is introduced and we are told of the cataclysmic effects of that first sin. First we see Adam and Eve hiding from God. Before they lived in perfect harmony and relationship with God, but because of sin against God, it results in shame and alienation. The relationship was deeply severed. We also see that sin impacted the relationship between Adam and his wife Eve. They begin blaming one another for the mess they had created. In that sense, they are alienated even from themselves. They can't see themselves for what they are. They can't own up to their mistakes. And then finally, they are alienated from the earth. Before they lived in harmony in the Garden, cultivating it and nurturing it, but after their sin, they are expelled and are resigned to a life of toil and hardship.

It'd be good for each of us to take an honest look at our own lives. Hasn't sin in our own lives resulted in the same things? When we sin, first and foremost, we are alienated from our loving creator. We don't want him to intrude. We see him more as an enemy than as a friend. We see God as a slave driver that wants to overbearingly control our lives, to restrict our lives, rather than as a loving Father, who wants to love us, protect us and care for us. That alienation with God is undeniable.

But, equally undeniable is the alienation we have with other people. Why is that we are not at peace with ex-boyfriends and girl-friends? Why is it that we all have people we dislike? Why is that we fight with our spouses and with our parents? Why is it that we can't forgive and hold on to grudges? This too is a result of sin. Sin ruins and destroys relationships.

Then think about what sin does to ourselves. One of the things sin does is that it prevents us from seeing ourselves as we truly and really are. Because of sin we say that we're okay, when we're really not okay. We look at ourselves and cannot see that something is wrong, even when we know and others have told us, that something is wrong. It's like the alcoholic that refuses and can't admit to having a drinking problem. Likewise we too convince ourselves that we don't have a problem. Because of sin, we've lost our identity that's supposed to be rooted in our Creator, in God, so because we all need an identity, we try to make one up for ourselves. We tell ourselves that my career is my identity. We fool ourselves into thinking that who I marry will forge my identity. Parents think that the success of our children will form their identities.

And, because of sin, our relationship with the planet, especially as a human race, is pretty messed up. We've exploited the planet and its resources rather than faithfully stewarding it. We've become hoarders, selfish and greedy, rather than generous.

But, in the midst of the tornado of sin and its effects in chapter 3, there's a glimmer of incredible hope. In verse 15, God says to the serpent, the devil, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Theologians call this the Protoevangelion, the first gospel. Here's what it's saying. The woman will have an offspring, a descendent, and this offspring will receive a serious blow from the serpent. The serpent will strike the offspring's heel, a painful and serious injury. But the offspring will crush the head of the serpent, which will be a fatal blow.

And, the rest of the Bible, all the remaining chapters, moves the drama to this point. The remainder of the Old Testament moves toward finding out whom this offspring will be. And when we get to the New Testament we find out who he is and how he did it. The blow to the heel was the death of Christ on the cross. But the crushing of the head was done when Jesus died and rose from the dead. (Col 2:15) "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

The word of God, the holy Scriptures are to tell us that there is a way for us to be saved. Sin does not have the final say. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of God. He is the Word, the promise, who became flesh, lived and then died and rose again, so we too might be saved.

Let's pray.