

Psalm 119:41-48

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[0 : 00] Good morning again. As you saw in the bulletin, my name is TBD. Now, I'm really excited about this. I talked to Bill a while back, and we know he's struggling with some health issues this morning.

And he was asking me, would you be able to preach in my stead? And I said, yeah, no problem. I've got all these things that I've been doing, these talks I do with our Officers Christian Fellowship Group.

You know, I can just dust off one of those and go. And then when he told me that he wanted me to do that this morning, I was led not to dust off what I already had.

And I ended up going through a study of what we read last week, because there was a couple of things in that that it just didn't seem like the puzzle pieces fit together.

And one of the things we talk about with our OCF kids at the academy is, you know, when it looks like pieces of verses don't quite fit together, we know the Bible is the inerrant word of God.

[1 : 04] So they have to fit together. Maybe we need to flip them over or turn them on its side or do something with it. So that's what I did with the verses that we read out of Psalm 119 last week.

And I found some exciting stuff. I really feel like the Bible is a treasure trove. I've always been amazed at how I can look at the same text with a different need or a different perspective and come away with new enlightenment.

It just blows my mind. And that's my goal for you today as we revisit Psalm 119, 41 through 48. Mark Harber preached a sermon a couple of months ago out of this book.

I am not, but I know I am by Louis Giglio. And after he did that, I bought the book. And I would really commend it to you.

I think it's a great, great little book. It opens with this comment. Life is the tale of two stories, one finite and frail, the other eternal and enduring.

[2 : 08] The tiny one, the story of us, is as brief as the blink of an eye. Yet somehow, our infatuation with our own little story and our determination to make it as big as we possibly can blinds us to the massive God story that surrounds us on every side.

You know, in my mind, that's a perfect summary of the tension that we feel as we seek to live in a world that overwhelms us and our physical senses with the knowledge that we're destined for something greater.

I'm ashamed to say it, but just being open and honest with you guys, much of my focus is on the world I live in today, as if that was all I was ever going to have.

I know in my mind and heart that that's wrong, but I just get caught up in the world. It's easy to strive to preserve our earthly reputation and relationships as we pursue our relationship with God.

We seek to glorify God and be loved by him, yet we really want the world to love us too. As Christians, I think we should know better.

[3 : 21] 1 John 2:15 gives us a sobering reality check to ensure the main thing is really the main thing. It says, Do not love the world or the things of the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Sometimes I need that telephone pole upside my head to understand what I really need to do.

I want to focus on playing my part in God's enormous story. I look forward to the day when my tiny story fades to black and is overwhelmed with a clear view of God's timeless and incredible story.

And I get to enjoy the tiny part I get to play in his story. As we studied in Psalm 119 last week, I saw some of the things in that Psalm that reinforced thoughts that I already had.

And I saw other things where the puzzle pieces just didn't seem to quite fit. So I undertook a study to see how I could make the puzzle pieces fit. And the picture that resulted from that was informative and encouraging.

[4 : 32] And that's what I want to share with you this morning. It reconfirmed my understanding of the relationship of God or the relationship that God offers us and how this relationship, if I can talk, should impact our interactions with others.

It also gave me some new perspectives on some basic things that I'm really excited to share with you. The message this morning is as much about me preaching to myself as it is preaching to you.

But I invite you to participate in my journey. My prayer today is that I would fade to the background and that you would hear from the Holy Spirit and not me.

So let's pray together and we'll open up God's word. Lord God, thank you for the time we have to gather and the place that you provided to study your word. I know that our congregation is coming this morning with a variety of trials, joys, and personal struggles.

You know us better than we know ourselves and know what we need in the moment before we ask. I pray that you would make us attentive to your Holy Spirit to guide, interpret, and speak to our individual needs as we open your word and you open our hearts and minds.

[5 : 46] In Christ's precious name we pray. Amen. So let's start by reviewing the passage that we had from last week. I think Zach's got that queued up already. And if you would, let's stand in honor of reading God's word.

So Psalm 119 verses 41 through 48. Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise. Then I shall have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word.

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules. I will keep your law continually forever and ever. I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts.

I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame. For I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love.

And I will meditate on your statutes. That's the word of God. Please be seated. So let's set the stage for our study this morning.

[6 : 56] We're continually faced with this conundrum, these decisions to either I honor God or I honor men. And we're sojourners in this broken place with other broken people.

But these other broken people that we interface with, we can see, we can hear, we can touch. And it's easy to prioritize them.

It can feel many times that the world is not a safe place. And we're keenly aware of our vulnerability in front of others.

We want to be successful in the eyes of our neighbors and continually are concerned about how we're perceived. Because we want to be appreciated and respected.

We want to avoid criticism. Our self-worth is tied to the perception of what others think of us. And keeping up appearances is a constant concern.

[7 : 58] The fear of man makes it easy to compromise our relationship with God as we placate others to what we think will benefit us. In short, our natural state is to make our story in this life about us.

Our focus on pleasing men, though, is inconsistent with our relationship with God. So we have these people that we can see, hear, and touch.

In contrast to that, we worship a God that we can't see, we can't hear, we can't touch. Yet, I don't know about you, but I see physical evidence all around me that can only be explained by his creative fingerprints.

The glory of the sunrise that we see in the morning. The power of a storm or an ocean. The complexity of atoms knitted together to make our cherished grandchildren and children.

The love of my wife. Provision and protection that I so often take for granted. And a multitude of answered prayers that I can only explain because God personally intervened.

[9 : 13] We live in the mountains here, too. So we get to hear the rocks cry out all the time. All we have to do is look that way. It's really neat. I believe the innate knowledge of an all-powerful creator God is in everybody.

And I believe that you have to intentionally discard the evidence around you not to see God. I also believe that human beings are very, very good at ignoring huge things, especially if it makes them look bigger.

I love science, and I delight in seeing how God has assembled an unimaginably complex universe that can be described by simple, beautiful laws.

I really appreciate Albert Einstein's quote. He said, the most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it's comprehensible. Our creator is infinitely huge.

He is the very definition of power, authority, holiness, truth, integrity, creativity, justice, mercy, and I could go on and on and on. Yet in our quest to make our tiny story more meaningful, we reduce God to the point that he's just another man that we can ignore, dismiss, and even despise.

[10 : 37] Let me try to put him back in the proper perspective, though. Psalm 19 tells us the heavens declare the glory of God. All we need to do is look up to get a proper perspective, to see how big God is and how small we are.

So let's look up for a minute. I had the privilege of working for NASA at Kennedy Space Center as my first job out of school, out of college.

I was there when the Hubble Space Telescope was launched in April 1990. Fantastic, absolutely revolutionary new tool for exploring the cosmos.

And the first few years were spent looking at known astronomical features and getting these wonderful, spectacular new images of those.

But then over the years, things died down a little bit, and some of the scientists got together and they said, you know what, I wonder if we pointed Hubble at a blank spot in the sky where we can't see anything, and over a period of days we gathered data so that we could see real dim objects, what would we find?

[11 : 49] Zach, have you got your picture? This is what they found. These are not stars. These are galaxies. In fact, in this tiny little spot in the sky that they looked at over a period of about a week, they estimate there are 5,500 galaxies.

Wow. That's pretty amazing. It's estimated that there are over 2 trillion galaxies that we can currently see with the tools that we have.

So I have a thought for you. Next time you go to the beach, or since we live in Colorado, next time you go to the Great Sand Dunes National Monument, and you're standing in the middle of the sand that goes on forever, imagine if each grain of sand was a galaxy.

And imagine for a moment God's perspective of standing there in the midst of all these galaxies, these sparkling galaxies under his feet.

And think that each galaxy has, on average, somewhere between 100 and 400 billion stars, each grain of sand.

[13 : 10] Millions, billions, trillions. I'm running out of zeros on my calculator. I'm falling over in the sand. Yeah, me too. So, if a single grain of sand is a galaxy, how big are we?

God, our God, who's revealed himself, the great I am, spoke all of these countless galaxies and others yet to be discovered into existence with a word.

No effort on his part. He just spoke it, and it was. Does that help us understand just how big he is and how small we are?

Our stories are meaningless and will fade away like smoke, yet he invites us to play a role in his immense story, not for anything that we've done, but to glorify himself.

And we're the recipients of his incredible gift and participants in his incredible story. He chose us by name before creation to be in eternal relationship with him.

[14 : 25] Can you wrap your head around that blessing? It's amazing. As Louis Giglio points out in his book, I am not.

Yeah, I'm definitely not. Not even a speck in God's creation, yet I know I am. He knows and chooses me, and that's just incomprehensible.

I also believe that if God physically appeared to us here this morning, even with the tiniest shred of his power and majesty, we would all be trying to figure out how to meld ourselves with the floor.

And add to that rules and regulations that he's established to teach us how to properly interact with him. He's huge.

We're nothing. So he's well within his right to determine what those rules and regulations are. And with these rules comes the choice between perfect obedience and life and disobedience and eternal condemnation.

[15 : 31] That didn't sound like a very good plan for relationship building, does it? I wonder how many people have viewed God as simply a maker of suffocating rules that we don't want to follow.

And then God says in Matthew 5, 48, be perfect as I am perfect. That's an impossible goal to satisfy.

With this, the law has achieved its critical purpose and convinced us of our sin nature. Great. I feel really bad about myself. The obvious conclusion of many is that we're unworthy to approach God, so why even try?

They step away for the opportunity for relationship with him. They put aside the risk of choosing a very bad role in God's eternal story to focusing on enjoying the best of what this world has to offer.

And then there are others who rationalize a relaxation of God's perfect standards. They put their hope into being a good person.

[16 : 41] And they succeed if the amount of good they do exceeds the amount of bad they do. They never stop to think that perfect justice demands a consequence for the bad.

It doesn't go away. So does God base his relationship with us on fear of him? As Paul would say, by no means.

Proverbs 9, 10 states that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It's the beginning of wisdom. But it's not the end of the story.

It's just the beginning. We need to have a proper understanding of who and what God is. We need to understand how tiny we are and how infinitely enormous he is.

And with that perspective comes an incredible blessing because God invites us to be part of his eternal story. God created us for relationship with him.

[17 : 41] Not relationship built on fear, but on love and sacrifice. He wrote us into a story before creation began.

He clothed himself in flesh to hide his attributes that would scare us and revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Since we are unworthy and unable to come to him, he came to us.

When we couldn't survive the consequences of our sin, he paid the price for us to his glory, his crucifixion. We have these things everywhere in churches and around our necks.

As horrible as that was, it's only a dim picture of the real sacrifice. God the Son endured the penalty of eternal separation from the Father for every person in history that has been or ever will be redeemed.

Wow. This is and was something only God could do, and he alone gets the glory. The collateral outcome is one that we're covered, is that we are covered by a sacrifice and redeemed so that we can have a relationship with God himself.

[19 : 03] Now, I use that word collateral intentionally because God's story is not about us. We are not the center of God's story. We see God's focusing, see God's focus on glorifying himself throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

This is not a surprise. But many think it's arrogant that he would do that. To those that have that opinion, I would point them back to that picture that we have up there. He's the star of the enormous story.

We're not. A side effect of him glorifying himself is that he intentionally created us with the need for redemption so that he could sacrifice himself on our behalf.

He designed us with a Holy Spirit-shaped hole in our heart that only he could fill to complete us for our eternal role in his story.

We reap an unspeakable blessing of mercy, grace, and self-sacrificial justice with him glorifying himself. His glory, our blessing.

[20 : 09] He's revealed himself to me, and I feel his love and guidance, and I pray that he would reveal himself to you too if he hasn't done it. Yet in spite of the gift, we continue to live in a broken world, a world with temptation to retreat from the relationship that Jesus purchased for us and return to pleasing men.

So with this tension between prioritizing our relationships between Jesus and God, or God and men is strong, and we have to choose which one we will serve.

Proverb 29, 25 teaches, the fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. Galatians 1, 10 says, for I am now seeking the approval of men or God.

Am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Ouch. Matthew 10, 32, 33 says, so everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

But whoever denies me before men, I will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Scripture is clear.

[21 : 27] We cannot turn our face towards men without turning our back on God. So with this proper perspective in place, I'd like to look at three elements that we studied last week out of Psalm 119.

The first is how should we react to those who taunt us? Looking at verses 41 and 42. Second is how are rules and laws a good thing?

And that's talked about in verses 43, 46, 47, and 48. And lastly, how can we walk in a wide place? That seems a little counterintuitive to me out of verses 44 and 45.

So first point, let's look at taunting. So verses 41 and 42 says, Now I think the first place we need to start is a definition for taunting, which is to provoke or challenge someone with insulting, disrespectful remarks.

So really, taunting is a dual assault. I insult you. And then I'm also doing that with the intent to elicit a response from you.

[22 : 50] Now we are hardwired for fight or flight, right? So to fight, then we're right back in the game. We're attacking back. Or flight.

We back away. We lose face. We admit weakness. Which one do we do? Do we stand up or do we stand down?

Do we let our fear of man or our desire to look good in front of others dictate our reaction? Matthew 5, 39 teaches us that we're to turn the other cheek.

Is that the proper response in every case? How do we decide? A critical consideration is where does our relationship with God fit into choosing the response?

We are God's representative. We are members of a kingdom of priests purchased to serve him. Our focus is centered on defending ourselves, but do we think about whether or not our reaction glorifies God?

[23 : 55] Does our planned response consider how to honor him? Are we just seeking to maintain our standing with men or avoiding conflict at any cost?

1 Thessalonians 2, 4 says, But just as we've been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Do we ever stop and think that the sinner that's taunting us may be loved by God too? Hmm. And by seeking to injure them, are we hurting someone loved by God?

And that he will defend them against us? I don't think that's a place I want to be in. Are we so careful to avoid conflict that we injure others with our silence?

Silence. Hmm. Because we're depriving them of the perspective that they need. Proverbs 27, 6 is one of the first that I really love and have used with friends over the years.

[25 : 09] Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. wow there's a lot of wisdom in that James 5 19 and 20 says my brothers if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins so is silence really the right answer is running away really the right answer all the time I don't think so we need to be careful about our response let's look at the instruction that Psalm 119 41 through 42 gives us because I think it provides some insight into how to make that decision it begins with a prayer of our focused relationship with God recognizing that our safety and security rests on him alone it says let your steadfast love come to me we petition God to deepen our relationship that he's promised and purchased for us our relationship with him is our solid foundation on which we stand the second Corinthians 5 17 says therefore if anyone is in Christ he's a new creation the old has passed away and the new has come and Isaiah 28 16 says therefore thus says the Lord behold I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion a stone a tested stone a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation whoever believes will not be in haste we're instructed to stand on that stone we're instructed to leverage our relationship with God and then we're instructed to trust in God's word

Jeremiah 17 7 through 8 says blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord whose trust is the Lord he is like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes for its leaves remain green and it is not anxious in the year of drought for it does not cease to bear fruit wouldn't it be nice if I could just grasp the concept that my relationship with God is so important that I don't care what men think Lord I pray I could get to that place Proverbs 3 5 and 6 says trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight when we're confronted with somebody who's crabby who's taunting us I would argue what better place do we need to acknowledge him so that he can make our path straight standing on God's love and steadfast love steadfast love and salvation according to his promise and trusting his word enables us to put on the armor of God which we're all excited to do right so the belt of truth the breastplate of righteousness shoes put on with the readiness of the gospel of peace the shield of faith helmet of salvation and our personal favorite the sword of the spirit and typically we stop right there don't we because man we got all this stuff on us we're in good shape there's one verse that follows that that we seem to forget that I think is probably the most important one of all and that is verse 18 where it talks about praying all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication prayer ties all those elements of the armor together and teaches us how to use it our ability to properly respond to taunts then is not about clever retorts but about resting on God's truth and trusting in his promises to be our defense and trusting in him to direct how we should respond brothers and sisters this world is not our home we put far too much emphasis on our tiny earthly story that is destined to vanish we are part of God's enormous and eternal story and are under his protection but do we act like it?

we can and must solidly rest on our relationship and his promises because as Romans 8 31 reminds us if God is for us who can be against us?

let's go on to the second point are rules, laws really a good thing? you know when I was listening to Bill preach last week and we have these verses out of 43, 44, 47 and 48 my hope is in your rules hmm I will keep your law continually well I'm out on that one I delight in your commandments I love your commandments and I'll meditate on your statutes now wait a minute in my mind, snapshot we're talking about rules, laws, judgments those things are unpleasant to me so how can you put hope in God's law?

the law condemns it's stifling, constraining, limiting it's not positive I can't keep the law for five consecutive minutes much less forever so I couldn't put the puzzle pieces together David though must have a different perspective that I don't have so I need to see how the puzzle pieces go together and I thought David must see this in a different way and he does and this is part of what I learned reviewing this and I wanted to share with you so we're talking about Psalm 119 there's a couple of other psalms that David has where he talks about this too so in Psalm 19 7 through 11 he gives us a window or that gives us a window into David's perspective and I believe much of David's view of the law is related to the benefits of learning more about God's character and his instructions for us and these verses that I'm about to read

[31 : 52] I think provide some of the why behind his perspective so reading out of Psalm 19 starting in verse 7 the law of the Lord is perfect refreshing the soul the statutes are trustworthy making wise the simple the precepts of the Lord are right giving joy to the heart the commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes the fear of the Lord is pure enduring forever the decrees of the Lord are firm and all of them are righteous they are more precious than gold than much pure gold and they are sweeter than honey than honey from the honeycomb by them your servant is warned in keeping them is great reward so that got me thinking about biblical laws and I started studying that and I found that biblical laws serve multiple purposes so the first is they teach us about God's character holiness holiness and justice now I can definitely see that as a strong reason that David loves the law because I can see how he could delight in the Lord's commandments because it teaches us more about God and his character and I can learn to love his commandments because I love God and his rules reflect his nature that was a surprising finding for me secondly laws teach us how we must properly conduct ourselves as we seek a relationship with this holy perfect and immense God

God is enormous and all powerful and perfect and we are less than nothing in comparison but we exist to serve represent and have relationship with him it's important to know how to act and respond to him and I think we know that but this is part of the thing that creates the problem because my spirit is willing but my flesh is weak the third thing and this was another surprising thing for me the law protects us both from his wrath and risks in this current life now the current life risks you know if we're focused on the current life we understand that running around doing a bunch of stuff that God told us not to do is only going to get us hurt and get us in trouble and we also don't want to be under his wrath so that's important too but the concept of a barrier of fencing me in to make things better for me is a little bit counterintuitive until I was talking with Dawn and she said well you know there's this famous social experiment that probably lends some practical credence to this to the value of restrictions and they ran this test and they ran it many many many times and they always got the same answer so they have two environments for kids so environment one is I put the kids out of the open to play in a field where there's no restrictions to anything they can just do whatever they want to do and they have they have the whole gigantic field to play with the second is we fence them in we provide a a fence around them and the result was the kids that were put in a completely unrestricted environment tended to cluster in a small group they never really went out to explore this big environment that they had they stayed together they didn't range far from each other and they didn't use the open space the kids when they were put in a fence environment they ranged about the entire open space that fence provided some security and they they covered covered up the available space for that so the conclusions they had from the study was the lack of constraints make kids feel vulnerable so they cluster together for security constraints constraints make children feel safe to explore the limits rules limit but they also protect rules provide security consistency and oddly enough promote freedom sounds counterintuitive but it's a demonstrable fact

I thought that was fascinating studying this area showed me another aspect of the law that I didn't previously appreciate there was a verse that I missed in Galatians I guess so in Galatians 3 23 through 26 Paul states before the coming of this faith meaning where we are now in Christianity we were held in custody under the law locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed so the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith now that this faith has come we are no longer under a guardian so in Christ Jesus you were all children of God through faith I had never appreciated the law being a guardian until Christ but retroactively I see that now the law protects us and teaches us about God it provides instruction on how we should interact with and honor God and it prepares us for redemption by making the need for redemption clear wow and that leads into the fourth point here lastly the law convicts us of our need for God's restoration is we understand that we cannot restore ourselves thankfully

Ephesians 2 8 and 9 says for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is a gift of God not by work so that no one can boast God glorified himself through his self-sacrifice to redeem us from our sins against him we provide the failure to abide by his law and thus warrant judgment that's our role good for us God provides grace salvation and faith for salvation all are a gift of God our works play no part in salvation other than providing the need for it it's really his glory alone solodeo gloria we can read all these posters that we have around our church here so let me look at a final point then so I guess that really changed my view of the law because I always thought of the law as negative that was a blessing to me as I went through this and the final point walking in a wide place and testifying to God testifying about God

Psalms 119 45 and 46 says I should walk in a wide place for I have sought your precepts I will also speak of your testimony before kings and shall not be put to shame and the context of walking in a wide place seems kind of contradictory to me at first blush because we're taught to follow the strict rules stay on the narrow path enter through the narrow gate constraint constraint constraint constraint so where does this wide place thing come from again you know this is David's view there are two other Psalms where he talks about a wide place too that gives some perspective about what where he is because his thinking is not I'm not in the same place where he is so Psalm 18 says in verses 1 and 2 I love you O Lord my strength the Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer my God my rock in whom I take refuge my shield and the horn of my salvation my stronghold and if we skip down and pick up at verse 17 through 19 it says he rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me for they were too mighty for me they confronted me in the day of my calamity but the Lord was my support and he brought me out into a broad place he rescued me because he delighted in me and then if I look at Psalm 31 8

[40 : 49] David says you have not given me into the hands of the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place in each case the wide place is provided following moving into God's protection in his provision so reading these Psalms in light of the previous discussion about the law this leads me to conclude the following God wants us constrained and protected he wants us to be the kids with the fence around us he wants us to stay on the narrow path and be kept safe from the dangers on either side he wants us to enter through the narrow gate because Jesus is the only way to the father but upon entering the narrow gate things change we're redeemed and sanctified we're now able to live in a wide place that's clearly described in

Revelation 21 and 22 we're safe with God now and able to see clearly his immense story and are now able to communicate with others even those in authority with confidence because we are his we get to play in the wide place and be part of his story wow and we are home praise God let's pray together God thank you for this story I know better now how to understand your law and its protection and provision salvation I thank you for including us in your massive eternal and enduring story and look forward to the day that the veil will be lifted and we can see it in you clearly in Christ's name we pray amen amen