

YOUR WORD AND MY SUFFERING

Text: Psalm 119:105-112

Readings: Deut 4:44-5:21; Eccl 5:1-7; Matt 5:33-37;

Theme and purpose: I times of suffering we know God's word is a light for our path and we resolve to keep his commands.

Ropes come in various sizes, strengths and lengths. They can be made of nylon, polyester or twine. They may have multiple strands or just two. Psalm 119 is like a rope with two strands. There are two main themes that run through this psalm; one is the Word of God and the other is this man's suffering. These two are intertwined throughout the length of this psalm.

This is very clear in this *Nun* section – it is about God's word and his suffering. He begins with a promise he had made about God's law, then describes his great suffering, and then concludes with a resolution about God's law.

So we will consider these three parts; his promise, his suffering, and his resolution.

1. HIS PROMISE REGARDING GOD'S LAW (v 105-106)

a. As he begins this new section he states again **his conviction** about the law of God; this is perhaps the best known verse of this psalm; "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

This verse is very well known to members of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand because this is the motto of our denomination.

This is stated in typical Hebrew parallelism with the same thought being repeated in different words. God's word is a lamp and a light; it guides our feet and our path.

Think back to how God guided the people of Israel through the wilderness; during the day he led them with a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire (Ex 13:21f).

If you go out at night and there is no moon and no street lights then you will need a torch in order to see where are going.

It is the same spiritually. The world we live in is a dark place but if you have the light of the Scriptures you will be able to find your way. If you read the Bible and follow its directions then you will stay on the right path.

The word translated as "feet" is in the singular so it is literally "my foot" with the implication that God guides our every step!

The light of God's word points us to the light of the Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). To find your way you not only need the light of God's word but also the Light of Christ.

b. Having stated his conviction about God's word as a light this man then spoke about **his oath** regarding God's laws; "I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws."

An oath is a solemn promise, a binding pledge. Solomon in Ecclesiastes warns us to be careful about the promises we make. Don't be too hasty in making a promise because you will need to keep it!

All of us here have made promises at some time.

Many of you made solemn promises when you were married, and when you professed your faith, and when you presented your children for baptism.

This man made a promise to follow God's righteous laws. Some people who claim to be Christians refuse to make a promise like this because they think they are free from the law; they believe they should live by the *Spirit* and not by the law.

But this is a misunderstanding of the freedom described in the New Testament; we are freed from the *condemnation* of the law but not from its *obligation*. Yes, there are many Old Testament laws that no longer apply to us because they have been fulfilled in Christ, but we are still obliged to follow the righteous laws God has given to us in the Bible.

Are you taking God's law seriously? Are you obeying it? Are you keeping the promises you made in your profession of faith? Are you following the Lord Jesus? Are you doing this without giving up or slackening off?

2. HIS SUFFERING (v 107-110)

The middle part of this section describes the suffering of this man. As we have seen, this is a theme through the entire psalm.

He expressed this most strongly in the *Kaph* section in verses 81-88. That is the lowest point in the psalm. After that he slowly climbs up and out but his suffering continues. "I have suffered much" he wrote in verse 107. He responded to this in two ways.

a. He prayed

i. In his prayer he first of all offered a *petition* to God; "Preserve my life O God, according to your word" (107).

In verse 93 he put this as a statement – "you have preserved my life" – but here he expresses it as a request. He had been at a very low point and God had saved him, but the crisis wasn't over yet, his enemies were still attacking him and his life was still in danger. So he asked God to preserve his life.

He offered this petition to God on the basis of the promises of his word – "according to your word".. There are many promises in the Bible, that God will watch over his people, give us strength, cover us with his wings and carry us in his arms.

God does not promise that we will escape trouble, sickness or even death, but he does promise to be with us in these trials. And he promises to use these for our spiritual good.

The trials we go through are used to bring us to maturity (James 1:2ff).

The testing of our faith develops perseverance, which develops character, which develops hope, and hope does not disappoint us! (Rom 5:3-5).

When you are going through much suffering then ask God to use this to develop maturity, to increase your faith, to give you hope!

ii. His response to suffering was to pray with petition, and also with *praise*; "Accept, O Lord, the willing praise of my mouth" (108).

Even in his suffering he was thankful for all God's blessings and he expressed this in prayer, he thanked God and praised his name for all God's goodness to him!

What's more, he did not do this under compulsion or grudgingly, but rather voluntarily; it was *willing* praise!

The same thought is expressed in the New Testament in Hebrews 13:15 – "Though Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name." Every good gift we enjoy comes from God himself, and it comes to us through the Lord Jesus. And every expression of thanks that we give back to God must be done through the Lord Jesus. Our offerings, and even our praise, are acceptable to God only on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

b. In his time of suffering this man prayed, with petition and praise, and he **persevered**.

i. He was aware of ongoing danger; “I constantly take my life in my hands....”

If you have your life in your hands it can be snatched from you.

David was aware of this when he was running away from Saul (1 Sam 20:3; 27:1).

Jesus was aware of this during his earthly ministry because he knew the religious leaders were plotting to kill him.

Christians in other countries are living in constant danger and could be killed any day at any time.

We don't have that here but all of us need to recognise that our days are numbered and that the day of our death can come at any time.

ii. In his situation of danger this man said, “...yet I will not forget your law” and “I have not strayed from your precepts” (109b, 110b).

Spurgeon comments; “While he carried his life in his hand he also carried the law in his heart.”

Daniel did this even when faced with death in the lion's den – he did not forget God's law nor did he stray from God's commands.

In times of great trouble some people give up on following God; they become disillusioned and bitter and they renounce their faith and return to the world.

But others, going through great trials, tighten their grip on God, they hold on to him more firmly, their faith grows and becomes stronger!

What about you? Are you giving up on God or are you holding on to him? Are you still following his precepts?

The psalmist began by promising that he would follow God's righteous laws.

He then wrote about his suffering and responded by praying to God and by persevering in obedience.

3. Then he closed this section as he began with a **RESOLUTION** to keep God's decrees. (111-112)

a. Before he did this he first of all recalled **the privileges** God has given to him;

“Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.” (111)

A heritage is like an inheritance you receive, it is something you own or possess. Most people want to inherit houses, land, money, the family fortune, the silverware, the antique furniture.

But this man was glad he inherited God's statutes! Above everything else the Christian values God's word, the Bible, and all that it teaches us. We know that the treasures of this world are nothing compared to the treasures laid up for us in heaven!

We rejoice in God's word because it describes all the spiritual blessings we share in Christ – our election, forgiveness, justification, adoption as sons and daughters, and our future in heaven.

So the psalmist wrote, “Your statutes are my heritage forever...” The prophet Isaiah announced, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Is 40:8 cf. 1 Pet 1:25).

This is the word you have heard, that is preached to you, that you read in your Bibles. Everything else will fade and rust and decay, but “the word of our God stands forever”!

Do you value it more than anything else? Is it your heritage forever? And will you keep God's decrees?

b. This was the **resolution** of this man; “My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.” (112)

“My heart is *set*” means that this is what he has resolved to do, this is his decision, his choice, his obligation.

And it was the resolution of his *heart*; it came for the centre and core of his being.

But he also knew that he could only do this by God’s grace and in his strength.

Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his purpose” (Phil 2:12f).

This is not a one-off project, it is not a flash in the pan, it is not just requiring a burst of energy or a short sprint; no, this requires a long obedience in one direction. You need to begin well and then persevere to the end. You need to keep on keeping on. You need to continue to follow the Lord Jesus to the very end.

This will involve some suffering, in one form or another, as it did for the man who wrote this psalm.

It also requires that you know God’s word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path, and which directs us to Jesus, the light of the world! Keep following him, to the very end!

Amen

Sermon outline:

1. His Promise
 - a. His conviction
 - b. His oath

2. His Suffering
 - a. He prayed
 - i. With petition
 - ii. With praise
 - b. He persevered

3. His Resolution
 - a. His privileges
 - b. His resolve