Life for the Dying

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0:00] Psalm 119 verses 25 to 32. Let me read it out loud for us. My soul clings to the dust.

Give me life according to your word. When I told of my ways, you answered me. Teach me your statutes. Make me understand the way of your precepts.
And I will meditate on your wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word.
Put false ways far from me. And graciously teach me your law. I have chosen the way of faithfulness. I set your rules before me.
I cling to your testimonies, O Lord. Let me not be put to shame. I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart.
[1:06] So in this fourth stanza, we see that the author is in desperate straits. He's really close to death.

Twice he describes himself that way. And it says in verse 25, my soul clings to the dust. And in verse 28, my soul melts away for sorrow.
So the word soul is the Hebrew word that's sometimes translated as life. So my life or my soul clings to the dust. My life, my soul melts away for sorrow.
So whatever the situation might be, this psalmist is so full of sorrow that his life, very life, is ebbing away. And he describes it graphically as his soul melting away.
It's almost like ice melting. His sorrowful tears are melting away of his own soul. And he says his soul also clings to the dust, which is another way to refer to the grave.
[2:07] Because if you remember the fall and the curse that follows the fall in Genesis 3, 19, God says, You are dust, and to dust you shall return. So when we die, our soul, our bodies reduce to dust.

So in death, every human being is reduced to dust. And so the expression, my soul clings to the dust, is a reference to approaching death. It feels like he's dead. It's like dying, clinging to death.
But when he is sorrowful unto death, he cries out to God.
He says in verse 25, Give me life according to your word. And in verse 28, similar cry, Strengthen me according to your word.
What are the things, think about in your life, that you turn to when you feel depressed or depleted? Maybe it's music or my life is surfing, YouTube, binge watching.
Cookies or ice cream. It depends on the person. It could be different. Energy drink, alcohol. These things might provide temporary escape from the harshness of reality and improve maybe our mood for a time.
[3:23] But they don't impart life. But God can give us life according to his word. And so twice, he says, Give me life according to your word.

Strengthen me according to your word. Because the word of God can be a lifeline to people who are drowning in the sorrows of life. And the psalmist knows to rely on God's word. How? Because he's cried out to God in the past.
And God has answered him. He says in verse 26, When I told of my ways, when he told God of his ways, he says, You answered me. When the psalmist told God about his plight in the past, God came to his rescue.
He answered him and delivered him. And so now when he's facing yet another trouble in life, the psalmist says twice in verses 26 and 29, Teach me your statutes.
Teach me your law. He knows that living according to God's word, following God's word, hearing from God's word is going to help him to really grow past this desperate strait that he's in.

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[4:22] And so if we have heard the voice of God from his word in the past, if we have received guidance from his word in the past, and we have received help from God's word in the past, then we too, like the psalmist, when we're desperate, when we're longing for some help, we can turn to God's word and find that great help, strong help.

Because scripture is not merely an encyclopedia, right? Or a how-to manual that you turn to and you just got to find the right chapter and verse to live.
It's rather a book that brings us into greater, deeper relationship with God. It's a book through which God speaks presently. And so we need him to help us understand.
We need to listen to him personally. And so that's why the psalmist prays like this in verse 27 and 32. In verse 27 he says, So these prayers are showing us that genuine understanding of God's word only comes with God's help.
Only when God enlarges our heart, only when he enables our understanding and obedience can we run in the way of his commandments, follow his way.
[5:43] We might understand theoretically or conceptually, but we don't really grasp it in our hearts unless the spirit of God helps us. God makes us understand who he is as our father, as our God, as our savior.

And you may have noticed as we're reading through this, there's an emphasis on the way of the Lord, which shows us that God's demanding from us more than just mental assent, saying, yes, this is true.
Yes, I believe it. But he demands obedience. He demands moral compliance. He demands not just sacrifice, but obedience. And so five times in these eight verses the word way is repeated.
And it's used in contrast. So first, he contrasts my ways in verse 26 with the way of your precepts in verse 27. So our ways are full of sin and full of suffering and full of death.
But God's way leads to life everlasting. And then it also contrasts in verse 29 the false ways that we can be tempted to walk in from the way of faithfulness in verse 30.
[6:49] The psalmist says, I choose the way of faithfulness. So all other alternatives to God's way, the way that God's word teaches us is false. Whatever it might be. What kind of worldview, a system of morality, philosophy.

Whatever it is that other philosophers, religious leaders, or pundits propound in life. If they are contrary to God's word, they're false. They lead astray.
They mislead people. They don't deliver on the promises. But God's way, in contrast, is the way of faithfulness. The word faithfulness can also be translated as trustworthiness or honesty.
God's way is true to reality. It leads us in the right path. It's honest with us. It's faithful because it's the word of the God who is faithful. And then finally it says in verse 32, I will run in the way of your commandments.
So it's not just a set of beliefs, but a way of life. Following God, Christianity, and a path to walk on.
And so it's when we follow the way of God's word that it gives life to us even when we're in the midst of death.
[7:55] God's word has the power to do that. And this wonderful promise that's in this psalm is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Because he's the one who says in John 14, 6, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. So the way of life that's being described here in this psalm is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. He is the way of life. He is the truth. He's the way to the Father, only way to the Father.
And so he's the, as the incarnate word, the word made flesh, he fulfills what this inscripturated word, the written word promises. And he does that by, in the ultimate says, dying on the cross for our sins.
Paying the penalty of death that only we deserve. And then being raised to life so that when we believe in him, we do have eternal life. That's the way of life that he's leading us to.
And so following the way of God's word gives life to those who are sorrowful unto death. That's really the main point of this psalm. So let's reflect on that and we're going to pray following this psalm.
[8:59] But before we do that, Brian, let's sing another song. Let's sing.

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