

How to Walk in Freedom

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Psalm 119

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Psalm 119:129-136
Preached On: Sunday, April 14, 2024

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

Tonight as we turn to Psalm 119 verse 129, you know, it seems kind of odd using all those numbers in that capacity and I know many of you are familiar with what I'm gonna share with you but just for full disclosure, allow me to communicate once again that we as a church body are challenging ourselves this year to place an entire chapter of God's word in our heart. Portal number one is almost full. There's still some chapters that are left, but if I'd be honest with you, many of them are a list of names and genealogies and places and are difficult at best. Today we opened up portal two, meaning all 1,189 chapters are available in portal two. We've already had dozens of people that have jumped on board. I have no idea if they're repeat offenders, if they already took one in portal one or not. But if you are one of those individuals, whether here in person or online, that wants to be a part of it, wants to challenge yourself to take an entire chapter of God's word and to hide it in your heart and you went back and you looked at some of those passages in 1 Kings and Chronicles and such and said, "I just don't know," guess what? Psalms is open now in portal two. The gospels are open. All of it is opened up.

We would encourage you to be a part of it and as we challenge ourselves, we are walking through Psalm 119. Longest chapter in the Bible, 176 verses, 22 subsections, one overarching theme: the primacy that the word of God should have in our life. And tonight, we're gonna talk about freedom. We're gonna talk about that one thing that humanity longs for more than anything else, but rarely ever if can handle when given to them. Beginning verse 129 says,

129 Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. 130 The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. 131 I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments. 132 Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. 133 Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. 134 Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts. 135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes. 136 Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

Now when we talk about freedom, I know that that word is not used in this passage, however, as we're gonna see today, kind of the context, the flavor of this passage, there's this underpinning theme of what does it look like to live in and to walk freedom, and as I mentioned earlier those were those things that we as humanity that we truly, truly struggle with, and there's no better example than the very people who originally heard these words, sang these words, and celebrated these words, what we know or whom we know as the Israelites, the Jewish people. I mean, after all, it is that which we know as Passover, which is the feast that most embodies who they are, whom they believe in, and in whom they trust. That famous Passover celebration that takes place this calendar year, just a few days from now, is where they will look back to the days of captivity. They will look back to the days where for over 400 years they were enslaved by the Egyptians. They were tortured physically, mentally, emotionally, and then the Lord gloriously delivered them. We know the story of the famous ten plagues. We know the death of the firstborn as the final one. We know the journey south to the western edge of the Red Sea, the miraculous crossing upon dry land, and the waters regathered again over the Egyptian armies. It's a story of deliverance. It's a story of freedom. But it's also a reminder to each and every one of us how difficult it is to walk in freedom and how very few people actually, quote, succeed at doing so.

Once they got to the other side of the Red Sea, the only thing that stood between them and the Promised Land was 11 days. 11 days. Now don't get me wrong, 11 days is a long time, but compared to 400 years, not so much. The journey that they needed to take, get up, start walking, go to bed, repeat, 11 days, and they would have been on the edge of the place that they'd been dreaming about for generations. You know the story. They began to grumble. They began to complain. They began to struggle because they could not handle freedom. And I know we give the Israelites a hard time, but I'm gonna cut them some grace tonight. I want you to think about that generation that doubted, that generation that died in the wilderness. We give them a bad rap, and rightfully so, but can you think about something for a moment? Nobody who crossed the Red Sea with Moses, nobody who stepped foot on the other side, nobody who woke up the next morning outside of Egypt, none of them had ever known anybody who knew anybody who ever knew anybody who was ever free. They didn't know what it was like. They did not know how to operate in freedom, and so what did they do? They immediately cried out to Moses, "Give us back bondage. At least in Egypt, we knew where the food was, it wasn't much, but we knew where it was. At least in Egypt, we knew the parameters, even though they were painful, we knew what to expect." And one of the things that we discover is when it comes to living in freedom, that bondage oftentimes is more familiar and more comfortable than the freedom that God desires us to live in.

I know most in our context and culture are familiar with a Christian based financial ministry who has as its namesake a man by the name of Dave Ramsey and Dave Ramsey speaks of the bondage of that financial strain with this illustration. By the way, the reason I name dropped tonight is because I'm not taking credit for something he said because you might get upset about it. You know what he said? Bondage is a whole lot like a baby's diaper, it's wet, stinky, and nasty, but it's mine. How many times have we seen our own children and grandchildren refuse to stop playing, refuse to stop doing what they're

doing because that which was hindering them was familiar and it was theirs? The freedom that comes when bondage is removed.

Even as a young child, we rarely ever know how to walk in freedom and yet this passage describes what does it look like to walk in the freedom of the scripture. What does it look like to actually live a life because understand, this world is Egypt. It was prayed a while ago about this is a place of Goshen, that place that was protected. The world is Egypt and God says, "I've got freedom for you. I've got the ability for you to do things the way I've designed it so you no longer have to be in Egypt," and how many of us wake up on Sunday and say, "Let's go to the Promised Land," and by Tuesday or Wednesday we're all the way back in Egypt? It's what we're familiar with, it's what we know.

So what we discover beginning this section is the provision that the word of God claims to have for our lives. I love what it says in verse 129, "Thy testimonies are wonderful," meaning the scriptures are wonderful. Wonderful here doesn't mean, "Oh, that's just wonderful." No, no, that means that which causes wonder, that which causes us to stand in awe and to be mesmerized about how grand and how great its provisions are. Many of you may be familiar with this story. It's not a story of my life. It's the story of an acquaintance of mine now gone to be with the Lord. This individual that I knew, he had a photographic memory. In other words, he was able to read and then days, weeks, months later, he could recite it from the tip of his tongue. He just had a gift. This individual had a propensity to read scripture at an amazing rate. By the time he was upper middle ages, he had read through the Bible 99 times. 99 times. He decided that on the 100th, and remember, he has a photographic memory, okay, he's not like us where we read it and go, "Okay, I've gotta go back and do it again to find out what I read." I mean, he knew what he read. On his 100th journey through scripture, he decided to take what we might call a red pencil and circle everything he saw that he'd never seen before, something in scripture that he learned that he never learned before. Now I want you to think about this. You've got a man with a photographic memory who's read the Bible 99 times in about 30 years and he goes back and when he was done there were over 200 places where he said, "I've never seen that before. I've never learned that before." When we talk about the word of God is wonderful, it means that we can never exhaust it. There never comes a point where we say, "I got it. I got the book. I got everything there is to learn." If an individual can have that testimony, I dare say what ours should be.

Then what does it say? It says that it gives us light. It gives us understanding. Listen to verse 130, it gives understanding unto the simple. One of the most fascinating studies, and when I use the word studies, I know oftentimes in our context here we think of, you know, research grants and publications and such. Most studies aren't nearly as professional as being in a quote unquote university community, but one of the most fascinating studies, somewhat off record, is the impact that the Bible has on those who have no formal education. Here's what I mean. And by the way, I may go off the rabbit trail for a bit. You do realize that if you are incarcerated in one of the prisons in the United States, you can request a Bible and it will be given to you. Do you find it odd that you can request and receive a Bible in prison, but you can't have one in school? Have you ever thought that maybe if we allowed Bibles in school, we wouldn't have as many

people in prison? But nonetheless, I digress and I'm sorry. Actually, I'm not sorry. But that being said, a study was done about individuals whose educational pursuits were stopped short of high school graduation and the study was done and the research done about what does the impact of the word of God within a facility of incarceration, within a prison. You know what they discovered? Among men particularly, who had little to no high school education, that those who had a habit of reading the scriptures on a regular basis and attending chapel could pass their GED without even taking a course. Why? How? Because you know one of the things that you discover about reading the Bible? Do you know that you learn science in the Bible? You learn about the stars, the heavens? Do you know you learn math in the Bible? You say, "Really?" Memorize Ezra chapter 2. Every number man's invented is in that chapter. Trust me. You think about just the syntax of reading and the grammatical skills and such. In other words, when those that are of a simple mind, it doesn't just give us understanding, the Bible can give us direction even when we have none.

The third provision, I love this in verse 131. It's just a simple piece of mind. It says, "I opened my mouth and I panted for I longed for thy commandments." You know, the older that I get, the more sensitive that I have become to what you and I formally call dehydration. I had never experienced dehydration. It's about 10 years ago and can I be honest? I thought I was going to die. I really did. When I lived in South Louisiana, I did not realize how dehydrated you can get. You know, when I moved to South Louisiana some years ago, I thought it was odd. A bunch of guys from the church came and they helped me move and at lunchtime, they all changed their clothes. I thought, "Well, that's strange. They're fashionable guys." You know what I realized? They were preventing dehydration is what they were and they were staying hydrated. The first time I ever experienced dehydration, I really thought I was going to die. I'd never experienced anything like it in my life. But you know, one of the things I've learned throughout time is I can now, I sense it coming. I've learned the signs, working in the yard, whatever it may be, and all of a sudden, your limbs start to cramp. All of a sudden, you start to feel a little bit faint, a little light-headed. You know, it's interesting that in those moments, even though we're in the South, it's not sweet tea that gives us satisfaction, is it? It just makes it worse. Oh, but when that drop of cool water hits your mouth, and all of a sudden the cramping begins to cease.

When it says here that my mouth is open and I panted, the picture we have is this provision that the word of God can give us relief, but nothing else can, a peace of mind in a world with nothing but chaos, in a world that has lost its way. You know, I know that you know this, so forgive me for going there, but you realize the more that you digest the media and the news, the less peace you're going to have. I'm not against being familiar with the stories of the day. I'm not against being knowledgeable of the events of the day. But I would dare challenge us, myself included, maybe for every moment, every minute, or every segment that we digest of the news media, we ought to digest the word of God just to balance it out. The peace of mind, the calmness of spirit that it brings to us.

Then beginning in verse 132, there is this petition. He basically begins by saying, "Okay. This is how I see your word. It is wonderful, It can take me places and give direction that

I never dreamed of. It can give me peace of mind." It says, "Look upon me, be merciful," then it says in verse 33 or 133, "order my steps." You know, one of the things about life and by the way, I'm gonna give credit to a good friend of mine of days gone by, some of you hopefully will laugh at this. This buddy of mine says this, "You know what? Life's a whole lot like toilet paper The closer you get to the end, the faster it goes." You ever thought about that? It's pretty good observation, is it not? But one of the things I've learned about life is not only is Daniel chapter 12 true, that things are coming at us quicker and faster. You know, used to, we could tell somebody, "Hey, give me a day to think about that." Now people are insulted if we ask for an hour. I mean, everything is just moving so fast.

One of the endeavors that my family particularly enjoys as far as the vacation is concerned is we like to snow ski, and I've shared with you that my children's style of snow skiing is just straight down fast as they can go. However, one of the things about snow skiing that can be problematic is if you're at a place and you're on a mountain and you don't really know the runs or the directions. Can't tell you how many times that this has happened to me, that I have gone down a respective run, I get to a proverbial fork, and I go to the right, and just when it's too far to turn back around, I realize I went the wrong direction. Why did I go the wrong direction? Because either A) I did not read the signs properly or most likely B) I never studied the trail map. Do you know that when you check into a ski resort, the first thing they do is give you a trail map. Here's where everything is. I mean, they don't hide it. I mean, it's not like you show up, get off the lift and go, "Well, I hope this works out." They've told you. There's huge signs at the top that says this is where everything is. And so when you take the wrong turn, how easy is it to get upset when we had all the directions but we just didn't heed them.

So what does it do here? It says the petition is, "please order my steps." Verse 134, "Deliver me from the oppression," or deliverance. You know, that's not a word that we hear often in what we might refer to as Baptist churches. We've relegated that word to our Pentecostal brothers and sisters, but deliverance by strict definition means to be removed out of a particular scenario and taken and delivered to another. A very secular example is that when you order something online, it typically comes from a warehouse that is not in East Alabama and then it arrives at your doorstep. It has been delivered.

What does he say here? I need you to either A) remove me from those that oppress me or make it to where those who oppress me no longer have the capacity to do so. Some of the greatest wisdom that somebody gave me years ago is that when there's somebody oppressing you, when there's somebody that is struggling or you're struggling with, you need to pray the blessings of God on their life. Let me give you an example. Some of you, many of you, may have those that are in a supervisory role or some type of managerial role that you report to and you struggle on so many levels with that arrangement and it's easy to want to pray fire and brimstone on their head, is it not? It's easy. But based on this verse, you know what it guides us to do? Pray that God had blessed them and give them a promotion out of state.

"Deliver mine oppressors away from me." And then verse 135, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant. Teach me thy statutes." You know, when we talk about this petition, what do we pray that God will do with his word? First is order my steps. If you're struggling with carving out time for reading the Bible, studying the Bible, memorizing the Bible, pray to God, "God, help me carve out some time, arrange my steps." If there are those that are oppressing you, cry out that... by the way, if you if you struggle with those that are oppressing you, let me challenge you, read Psalms. You realize that basically the theme of Psalms is David is running for his life and God kept him alive. I mean, you talk about oppression, every time he turned around.

This last thing disposition, may my face shine. Now there's a famous passage in the Bible that talks about our face being as one that shines. It's found in Numbers chapter 6. It's the famous Nazarite vow. "May God's peace be upon you. May his face shine upon you." There's a current song now called "The Blessing" that takes that passage and extrapolates in a musical style. What's interesting though about a Nazarite vow that many of us may not grasp or understand is that a Nazarite vow, the most famous Nazarite, by the way, was Samson, a Nazarite vow is not necessarily a lifetime arrangement or agreement. In other words, when one entered into that Nazarite time, they made this arrangement with God. They said, "I will not cut my hair, I will not consume anything of an alcoholic nature, and I will not eat anything from a dead animal, so help me God." And during that time period, they dedicated, they committed, they set aside their life to the Lord. By the way, when individuals in their family passed away or seasons of life came, they could go back on that Nazareth vow and then return later. It was not a one and done permanent thing. But I know and you know that during those times, their countenance was different. There is something about our countenance when we are in the presence of the Lord. Think about Moses in the tabernacle. Think about Moses when he came out and the people were awestruck of how he looked. He'd been in the presence of the Lord. The Nazarites had been dedicated unto the Lord.

You know, I will make you a promise, the more time you spend in the word of God, the more your countenance will change, the more your disposition will change. There will just be something about you, much like Moses or a Nazarite, that naturally is reflected and as a response because you may not be physically in the tabernacle as Moses was, you may not be under a Nazarite vow as Samson was, but these are the words of God and when you are hearing them, receiving them, and exposed to them, you basically are having a face-to-face conversation with God and when you are in his presence as such for an extended period of time, it cannot help but change you. It cannot help but make your countenance so different. In fact, I would challenge you if your countenance is distraught, I would challenge you if there is a struggle, that that's not the time to be absent from the word of God, that's the time to spend more time in the word of God.

I heard an illustration lately, I wish I could lay claim to its origination, but I cannot. The illustration in relation to this was that when we're struggling, when the world is beating us up, when we feel like every time we turn the corner we hit a wall, whatever illustration you want to give, the illustration was that is the time to run closer to the Lord. That is the time to spend more time in the word of God. And this was the illustration given. Now it

was a men's study, so ladies forgive me, but it was about boxing. It was about that sport in which those athletes get in the ring and they attempt to pulverize each other. I don't know how to describe it any other way. And they said, what does a boxer do when they realize that the opponent is bludgeoning them? They get closer to them because the closer you are to their torso, the less they can extend their hands and strike you. And it was a mesmerizing illustration and here's what this guy was saying to a bunch of men. He said, "Guys, when the world is oppressing, when the world's coming down on you, that's not the time to run from the Bible. That's the time to run into it." It changes your countenance. You don't believe me, just look at the face of a boxer, one who's been hit and one that hasn't. There is a major major difference.

This passage concludes with what I've called tonight a problem, verse 136, "Rivers of water run down my eyes, because they keep not thy law." This morning, we talked about in the previous section, I hate every evil or false way. Here we see this sorrow, this heartbreak for those who will not allow the Bible to give them direction, that not allow the scriptures to give them deliverance, will not allow their disposition or their countenance to be impacted by such. Tonight as we draw to a close, I'm going to take you to Luke chapter 19. Luke chapter 19 is a passage that so parallels that verse. Let me set the scene for you. Jesus has come in to the Temple Mount. It's what you and I commonly refer to as Palm Sunday. He, as Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9 said, he came in on the back of a colt that no one had ever ridden before, descended down the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, to that famous eastern gate. There the Bible says that by tens of thousands they took the palm branches, they waved them, they declared, "Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" You know the scene. The Pharisees, as typical, they began to ridicule. They began to chastise and they said, "Jesus, shut them up." He said, "If they close their mouth, even the rocks will cry out." The Bible records in Matthew chapter 21 that Jesus entered straightway into that Temple Mount and for the second time in three and a half years, he went into that place where the money changers were and where they were selling with filthy lucre and all this extraordinary interest and such. He overturned the tables. He set the animals free. He declared, "You have made my house a den of thieves."

We love Palm Sunday. I mean, after all here, I'll just, I'm gonna be very selfish. I don't think we celebrate Palm Sunday any better than anywhere else than we do here on Palm Sunday night. It's a great celebration but you know, sometimes we forget how that night ended. He comes in gloriously, declares who he is majestically. I want you to pick up the story in verse 41 of Luke chapter 19. It says, "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Back to the last verse of tonight's section, the sorrow over those who do not subscribe to the words of God. I'm gonna ask you a series of very pointed yet somewhat rhetorical

questions tonight. Do you weep over your Jerusalem? You say, "My Jerusalem?" Do you weep over those you know who are rebelling against the word of God? Do you weep over those that are thumbing their nose at God? Do you weep over communities and cultures and entities and institutions that are so far away from the word of God? Now don't get me wrong, as Jesus overturned the tables, there is a time where the Bible calls righteous indignation but it must be accompanied by weeping. Jesus, the Bible does not describe him weeping very often, in fact, the only the time that word specifically is used for Jesus is in Luke chapter 11 verse 35 when he weeps over Lazarus. It says he came to Jerusalem and he wept. that last verse we read tonight says, "and I have sorrow over those who do not walk according to your ways." Tonight as we close I wanna ask you, when's the last time you wept over those that are in rebellion? When's the last time you wept over those that are living a life contrary to the person and the word of God? When's the last time you didn't just get mad at the news, but you wept over the news? When's the last time that you shed tears simply because your heart was broken at the rebellion against the word of God? Jesus comes in that famous Palm Sunday. Yeah, he overturned the tables. He spoke truth when nobody else would. Nothing wrong. But he wept over it. You know, it's one thing to celebrate the direction the Bible gives us, the deliverance it gives us, the countenance. Those are great things but there's another side of that coin. It can't all be about what it does on our behalf. There must be a godly sorrow, a weeping for those in our lives, both family, non-family, both local, both distance, who do not subscribe.

Before we close, I've heard in many of you, and thank you, give commentary on this morning in our service, the prayer that was offered for Israel. And I appreciate that. But can I tell you the hardest thing about Israel right now? The hardest thing about Israel is not the fact that they're getting attacked. They're the best military in the world. That's not the hardest thing. Let me tell you the hardest thing about Israel is that whether it's Iran, whether it's Hezbollah, whether it's Gaza, it doesn't matter who it is, you do realize that every person on both sides of this conflict, 99.999% of them are lost. And when you champion Israel's Iron Dome, do we sorrow over the hell-boundness of almost everybody involved in that conflict? Is God gonna let Israel down? I celebrate, they're the apple of his eye. I'm not worried, God's got it. But then there's that last verse and there's Luke 19, Jesus wept. Jesus wept because they missed the message. Our weeping isn't just because people are making decisions we don't like. Our weeping isn't just because people are making life more difficult than we like it. Our weeping is because in their rebellion, if they do not turn, repent, and believe, it's not just a bad decision, it's not just bad policy, it is an eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. Have we wept over our Jerusalem? That is a hard pill to swallow.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight as we come to our time of decision, I know it's Sunday evening. You may be one of those here tonight in person, you may be online, and there has never been that time where you've bowed at the cross of Jesus. There may have never been a time where you've admitted your sin condition and asked him to save you. The Bible says that today is the day of salvation. Cry out to him. Call out to him. The Bible says whoever will do so he will save. But I know that most of us, most of us, we're already believers and we know people in our sphere of influence, we know people that we've never had personal conversations with, but their decisions

influence us greatly, both locally, nationally, and globally, the question tonight is have you wept over their soul? Have you wept over the eternal condition of their soul? How about those that you know that are believers. As Jeremiah would claim, they are backslidden. Oh, they're headed to heaven one day, but they're walking the road of hell right now. Have you wept over them? Tonight, though it may not be a physical dispensing of tears, may we weep over the lost, may we weep over the backslidden, may we weep over the condition and the chaos of this world that cannot be better pictured than the place in the Bible known as Egypt. Whether it be a public decision or not, may tonight be a night where we see things God's way and not just the way we'd like them to be.

O God, tonight your word is a double-edged sword. Lord, on one side of that sword, we celebrate with your goodness, we celebrate with your mercy, we celebrate with your provision and your protection, but on the other side of that sword, God, we confess tonight, it hurts. It hurts to see the lost not care. It hurts to see the backslidden in rebellion. It hurts to see how much of this whole world is so contrary to you and so, God, I pray, that tonight we wouldn't just bask in the goodness and the greatness of your provision and your prophecies, but our hearts, God, our hearts would be broken for our Jerusalem. O God, today, may we weep as you wept. May we respond as you responded. And O God, tonight, as we as a body come together and sing one of the great songs of the faith, may its message tonight mean more to us maybe than it ever has before. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.