

Evening Service - Mr Donald Macaulay (Carloway)

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Preacher: Mr. Donald Macaulay

- [0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the passage of Scripture that we read, Psalm 119. And we can read again at verse 17.
- Deal bountifully with your servant that I may live and keep your word. Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.
- I am a sojourner on the earth. Hide not your commandments from me. And especially verse 18.
- Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I was told by Mr. Campbell that I'm supposed to ask some questions for the children to answer.
- But I see only one this evening. So I don't know if it would be fair to pick on you. But maybe the grown-ups. I'll leave the questions for the grown-ups as well. The first one is quite easy.
- [1 : 17] How many letters are there in the Hebrew alphabet? And we'll see that as we go on. And secondly, I'd like you to think about what kind of psalm is this?
- There's a special name for this psalm and various others in the Old Testament as well. There's a special name for it. And see if you can remember what the special name for it is.
- And then thirdly, there are three verses in this psalm that don't use a certain term or word.
- And I want to see if you can figure out what that word or term might be. I'll give you hints as we go along. So there's the questions for you to meditate on.
- It's a fascinating psalm, Psalm 119. It's interesting. It's one of the... It's not the only one by any means, but it's one of the few psalms that we have no inscription at the beginning of it.
- [2 : 31] We don't know who wrote it. We have no indication as to when it was written or why it was written. But we have to bear in mind, of course, like all the psalms, they all reflect on human experience, but point us to the Word of God.
- And not only point us to the Word of God, they are part of the Word of God, but they point us particularly to the Messiah who was to come.
- Some psalms are more obviously Christological than others. But in all the psalms, we are given visions of the Lord Jesus Christ or pointers to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- And this psalm is no different. Now, I suppose one of the first things you noticed about it when we were reading it, boys and girls, is that it's divided into sections.
- And you will see that at the beginning of every section, and again, depending on what Bible you have, what print of the Bible you have, there may be a weird squiggle in front of the letter as well.
- [3 : 55] Now, these are actually Hebrew letters. And what we find is that the psalm is written according to the Hebrew alphabet.
- The first letter in the Hebrew alphabet is the one at the beginning, Aleph, equivalent to our letter A. And so on, it goes through the alphabet, Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, He, and so on.

And unlike English, boys and girls, there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

22 letters. So this psalm is then divided into 22 sections. And you can see all you have to do is look over the page a little bit, and you'll see that 22 multiplied by 8 gives you, of course, the final number of verses in the psalm, 176.

176 verses in the psalm. Each section is 8 verses. Now, in the original Hebrew, these 8 verses were actually 8 lines of poetry.

[5 : 20] Remember, of course, that all the psalms are written as poems. So you have 22 sections of 8 lines each. And here's the amazing thing about it.

In every section, the line begins, the first word begins with the letter of the alphabet of the section.

So in the first section, every line begins with the letter A. Now, that, of course, does not happen in English. It's impossible to translate.

It's impossible to do that in a translation. And in the second section, every letter or every line begins with a word with the letter B.

And then with C and D and so on. This is not unusual in Scripture. There are 8 other psalms in the book of Psalms that are written in the same way.

[6 : 25] There's a passage in the book of Proverbs that's written in the same way. And a couple of chapters in Lamentations that are written in the same way as well. And there is a special term that we use for this.

When you use the letters to spell out something, we use it very frequently. For example, we have one, I'm not using the term yet, we have a word we talk about a lot.

Grace. Saved by grace. Grace. And so we use the letters in grace and we say, grace, oh, that's God's riches at Christ's expense.

God's riches at Christ's expense. And I'm sure you've guessed it now. It is what we call an acrostic. That's the special name that we give to this particular technique, that it is an acrostic.

And that gives us a clue, I think, as to who wrote this psalm and why it was written. If we had time to scrutinize the whole psalm, we would see that indeed it deals with things that seem to be common to the life of David.

[7 : 51] And I personally think that the psalm was written by David. There are so many things in the psalm that we can see that can, I shouldn't say that they refer only to David, but they certainly do refer to David.

And I think there was another reason. An acrostic is a memory tool. It's there to help you remember something.

And I think David's purpose in writing this psalm was that he wrote it specially for Solomon. That Solomon would remember, would learn this psalm, because the psalm focuses and concentrates on the law of God.

It doesn't always use the word law. We'll see that many, many, many times as we look through. We'll see different synonyms, different words that mean the same being used for law.

But it starts off that way. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. And in the second line, it's testimonies. In the third verse, it's ways.

[9 : 07] In the fourth, it's precepts. Then in the fifth one, it's statutes. Then six commandments. Seven rules. And eight statutes again.

And we'll find this pattern throughout the whole psalm. There are only three verses in the whole of the psalm, in the whole 176 verses, that do not mention the word law or a synonym for the word law.

It's verse 84, verse 122, and verse 132. Now, you would need a really good memory to remember that. Of course, I've got these written down in front of me, so I can remember them.

But it's not easy to remember all these little details. But when we have a memory tool, it should be easier for us to learn the psalm.

I remember my father speaking about a man when he was young. They were out at a fank at Ben Rackledge, out past Shobos there. And that there was a man there who sang the whole of Psalm 119 in Gaelic.

[10 : 22] I don't know whether he presented each line or not. He didn't mention that. But who sang it from memory at the fank. I wonder how many of us could do that now.

And I think I was speaking to Mr. Graham some time ago about whether we could find out who this man was. And he was telling me of a lady, I think it wasn't Del, if I remember.

It wasn't Del. A lady who used to do the same when she was milking the cow. She sang Psalm 119. And you see, it's not fashionable now.

It's one of the things that we seem to have lost, is memorizing Scripture. Committing it to our memories. It used to be taught in schools. I'm sure it's still taught in the Sabbath school.

But it's not fashionable. The idea of memorizing things is an idea that seems to be frowned on in education nowadays. But anyway, that's a different thing altogether.

[11 : 29] So this is what the Psalm is. It's an acrostic. It's a memory tool. And that is why I believe that David is writing it in order to teach Solomon so that Solomon would memorize and remember that there is nothing more important than the Word of God.

The law of God. The precepts. The statutes. The testaments. The commandments. Whatever synonym you want to use for it. That that is the most important thing that a person can memorize and keep in his mind during his life.

And that's why he says at the beginning of the second section in verse 9, how can a young man keep his way pure? That he's referring this back to Solomon as a young man.

But I think verse 17 gives us an even clearer clue of the fact that this is David himself who is writing. Deal bountifully with your servant.

That I may live and keep your word. How many of us would take it upon ourselves to call ourselves servants of God.

[12 : 57] But that is what David does here. And there is a sense of caution which all believers are servants of God. But there is a special sense in which the servants of God are those who preach his word.

And David was very much a servant of God in that sense. And as a servant of God, he was under a special unction from the Holy Spirit.

That meant many times that he wrote things according to the way that he was inspired that he didn't understand.

It's in exactly the same way as you and I. Even although the Holy Spirit dwells in us, there are things in Scripture that we cannot understand.

If we search the Scriptures, as Jesus said, search the Scriptures, then we find more and more things as we grow in knowledge and understanding.

[14 : 10] But I don't know anyone who would take it upon himself to say that he understands perfectly everything in Scripture.

I think I mentioned before, I believe the virgin birth. I don't understand it. I don't understand it. I can never understand it. But I fully believe that it took place.

But there are many other things. And this is David's plea as he comes to verse 18. Open my eyes. Open my eyes.

Now you wouldn't make that plea unless you are aware that you are blind. When you see someone who is blind, of course, they may have a guide dog or they may have some kind of electronic instrument nowadays or a stick to help them along.

But that's not the kind of blindness that is really referred to here. In the original Hebrew, what it says is, Take away the veil from my eyes.

[15 : 23] Take away the veil from my eyes. Why? So that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Now you and I, as we look back on our lives, and especially before we were converted, we can see very clearly how there was a veil on our eyes.

Even when we read God's Word, sometimes under duress, sometimes willingly, we couldn't make heads or tails of part of it. We didn't understand it.

And perhaps, in a sense, we didn't really want to understand it either. And there's the difference very often. Because now, when the believer comes to the Word of God, he wants his eyes to be opened.

He wants to see wondrous things out of your law. And perhaps we should consider, first of all, what is meant by law here.

[16 : 28] Now most people, when asked the question there, what does law mean, would think immediately of the two tables of stone with the Ten Commandments that were brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses.

You remember, of course, that he broke the first ones when he saw the idolatrous worship of the golden calf. The ones that were written, as Scripture says, with God's finger.

But the second set of stones that he presumably had to chisel the Ten Commandments on, these were the ones that were kept in the testimony, in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle.

And you and I have a tendency, when we think of the law here, that we are thinking of the Ten Commandments. But David's use of it is much wider than that.

You see, if we think of the law here, we tend to think that we're dealing with the moral law. And it's interesting that there is, of course, in the Old Testament given to us both the moral law and the ceremonial law.

[17 : 51] Some of you might be more familiar with the terminology in Gaelic. Lough na mogaanen agus lough na hesgraan. The moral law and the ceremonial law.

And it's quite fascinating that in the psalm, there is no mention made of either the moral law, in that sense, or the ceremonial law. They're not brought in.

Why is that? Well, it's very probably because what David is referring to is what the Jews later on would refer to as the law, meaning the first five books of the Old Testament.

The Torah. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. And that's probably all the Hebrew Scriptures that David had at this time.

There are some who think that he may also have had the writing of the book of Joshua. Others suggest that the book of Judges may have been written by this time.

[18 : 55] But their concentration was particularly on the first five books of the Old Testament. The Torah. And it is there, of course, that the law is given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

But then we tend to make a major mistake. We tend to think that the law didn't exist until it is given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

There's no mention of it during Abraham's time, or Isaac, or Jacob. There's no mention of it during the captivity in Egypt. There's no mention of it no matter how far back you go in Scripture.

It's not specifically mentioned until the law is given at Mount Sinai. But nevertheless, when we look back at the law, we have to consider that what we're looking at is the first five books.

And everything that is contained within them. Does that mean that the law didn't exist before Mount Sinai? Of course not.

[20 : 13] Of course not. God's law existed in eternity before anything was ever created.

And sometimes it's hard for us to get our heads around that. But it is part of the essence of the Godhead. The divine decrees.

The divine law that was there before anything was created. And yet, isn't it amazing that the first breach of the law that we see is in heaven itself.

It's in the rebellion of the angels. Led by Satan. Against God's law. When the angels were created, we see, it seems obvious from Scripture, particularly from the book of Job, that the angels were created before the earth and the heaven was created.

But there are people who argue that that, or argue different points of view of that. But it seems very clear to us that Satan and his angels fell and were cast out of heaven before the creation of Adam and Eve actually took place.

[21 : 41] Now, again, there are those who dispute that. There are those who see it from a different viewpoint. But what is very clear is that the first breach of the law takes place with rebellion among the angels.

And perhaps something that you might like to meditate on yourself. It's very difficult to find an answer to it if there is an answer. Why did the angels rebel?

In all the picture that we get in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, of the blessed state of the angels in heaven, of God's holiness in heaven, you would think that there would be no reason whatsoever to rebel against the goodness and the holiness of God.

But that's what happened. That's what happened. And we see the same thing taking place in the first temple, in the Garden of Eden, in the first place of worship.

It's fascinating again to see how this occurs. It's the woman who is deceived, but Adam sins willfully.

[23 : 12] Adam sins willfully. And the first sin that Adam commits in his disobedience to God as our representative, as our federal head, is the sin that comes to every single one of us.

Original sin. All mankind fell with Adam. It's hard for us to understand that.

And I wonder how many of us ever think of original sin, that we are guilty of original sin. When we're meditating on our sin, for we sin daily in thought, word, and deed.

And we are well aware and conscious of that literally all the time. But I have to admit, original sin is not something that comes to my mind very often.

Maybe it does to you. Maybe it does to you. I don't know. But there's another one for you to meditate on. But what do we see? We see that even in the fall, even when Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden, and the flaming cherubim, the cherubim are placed at the entrance.

[24 : 37] Remember that the cherubim, again, as we see them in the curtains of the tabernacle, and on the Ark of the Covenant, represent the holiness of God.

That a flaming sword, the sword of God's justice, is placed at the entrance to Eden. So there is no way that Adam and Eve can return to the garden.

But something wonderful occurs as they are cast out. Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous, wonderful things out of your law.

That when they are cast out, they are clothed in skin. In the Hebrew it's in singular. They are clothed in the skin of an animal.

Because they were naked before that. And there we see from the first shedding of blood that God's mercy and God's grace is shown to mankind.

[25 : 49] Isn't it amazing how we see the Lord Jesus Christ from the very beginning of Scripture? The blood that is shed.

The animal had to be, whatever the animal was, the coats of skin that were made for them, whatever it was, the animal had to be killed and its blood shed before the skins were available or the skin was available.

And that, of course, like so many other things in the Old Testament, is a wonderful sign of what was to come.

That it was only by the shedding of Christ's blood that you and I could be clothed in holiness in time to come.

There was no other way that sin could be forgiven. And we see this so often throughout not just the moral law but the ceremonial law as it's given.

[26 : 57] Now, I don't have time in 15 minutes to go through every single wonderful thing that points us to the Lord Jesus Christ in the first five books of the Old Testament.

But there are some things that stand out to us more than others. Think of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his only son whom you love.

It's the first time the word love is used in Scripture at the sacrifice of Isaac. And that Abraham through his obedience goes all the way to the top of Mount Moriah where the temple would be built centuries later.

And is about to sacrifice his only beloved son at the Lord's instruction. And you remember, of course, the story from that, how the angel of the covenant stopped him from doing that.

And the symbolism is so clear. Your only beloved son. How often do we hear the Lord Jesus Christ referred to in the New Testament as, this is my beloved son.

[28 : 30] And as you start to draw the threads from the old into the new, it's amazing how David and the others and the prophets, the things that they saw but didn't fully understand.

And how you and I with the revelation of the New Testament are able to knit these things together and see how wonderful the pattern of God's grace was from the beginning of the books of the law right through and to the cross and Calvary and everything that follows after that.

That's why you and I need our eyes opened. As we study God's word, we need to see the links that are formed from the Old Testament to the New in showing the Lord Jesus Christ to us.

Perhaps the next clearest instance that we get in the Old Testament in the five books of the law is the Passover as they leave Egypt. The sacrificing of the Lamb.

And you remember that the Lamb's blood had to be gathered in a bowl and then it had to be applied to the door.

[30 : 10] The blood was useless sitting in a bowl unless it was applied to the door and the lintels of the house then it had no effect whatsoever.

It would not have prevented the angel from carrying out the death of the firstborn. The blood of the Lamb, the blood of Christ has to be applied to the door posts and lintels of our heart.

It's no use just sitting there. It needs to be applied efficaciously by the Holy Spirit. And you can see so often as you look at the work of the Spirit in the five books of the law, as you start to put these things together a pattern emerges for us that the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us more and more as we go on through the books of the law.

As we leave the Passover, what do we come to? We come to the Exodus from Egypt. How many amazing things took place there?

the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army. But even more amazing is when we come to the encampment at Mount Sinai.

[31 : 46] There's a particularly fascinating chapter, Exodus 24, that you might like to look at when you go home, where God summons Moses and Aaron and his four sons and seventy of Israel's elders up to the top of the mountain.

Perhaps not to the exact top, but certainly to the mountain. And we read that it says that they ate and drank with God.

That's quite amazing. They ate and drank with God. What did they eat? What did they drink? There are many who think that this was not only the first worship service that took place, but that it was the first covenant meal and possibly the first communion service, that maybe God provided bread and wine there for them.

And they are unable to describe anything of what they've seen, except the wonderful pavement, the blue sapphire colored pavement. Some commentators think that that was because they were on their hands and knees in awe at God's glory all the time.

It's an amazing chapter, one that you can have a look at yourself later. But there are so many other wonderful things. Look at all the ceremonial law.

[33 : 22] look at the construction of the tabernacle. And look particularly at the items of furniture in the tabernacle. Come to the Ark of the Covenant, where the cherubim are above it with their wings almost touching above, the symbol of God's holiness.

But they are looking down on the mercy seat below them. where the blood of the atonement would be sprinkled once a year by the high priest.

In the New Testament, it's commented often, or I should say, it's mentioned often that these were things that the angels desired to look into, but couldn't understand.

couldn't understand. Do you and I understand the symbolism of everything that took place in the tabernacle?

Why it goes from the most precious material in the center, in the inside, to baser materials on the outside, from gold to silver to brass?

[34 : 43] why the holy of holies is a cube, a perfect cube. There are so many things that we come to meditate on this, but the most important of all, the law, the tablets of the law are in the ark, underneath the mercy seat.

what does it remind you of? What did Jesus say? He says, I came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law.

And the mercy seat and the sprinkling of the blood of the atonement is the thing that is above the law. It's the thing that brings each and every one of us.

to be able to have salvation because we cannot keep God's law. We are incapable of keeping God's law.

And from the mercy seat as you move outwards, so many other wonderful things. Again, I don't have time to go through the whole of the sacrificial system, but as you look at the sacrificial system, you see that each thing points us in one direction.

[36 : 10] Look again at what happened almost immediately after that. While Moses is still on the mount, Aaron and the people are making a golden calf to worship.

How quickly do we fall away from the law? Maybe your mind is well centered on it just now as you listen. but in a few hours' time tomorrow, and perhaps that's something that all of us in our weakness can be honest and admit to, that there are times when we don't meditate on God's law as we should do.

In fact, probably we meditate upon it very little. Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things.

Think about the manna, the provision of bread for forty years in the wilderness that fell every single day to feed over a million and a half people outside the camp.

It didn't fall on the camp, it fell outside the camp. And they had to go and gather it and a double portion on the day before the Sabbath, because otherwise it would rot away.

[37 : 37] But nevertheless, a golden pot of manna was kept in the testimony, in the ark of the covenant, as a witness.

manna is and when we come to the book of Revelation, we are told of the hidden manna that God pours out on his people every single day.

It's the hidden manna that feeds you spiritually. It's the hidden manna that opens your eyes so that you can behold wondrous things out of the law.

Some commentators have calculated that 1,500 tons of manna fell every day round the camp as provision for the children of Isna.

That would have been 3,000 tons on the day before the Sabbath as well. That's amazing when you think about it. And yet when you think about the hidden manna that you are given when you come to the word of God, how amazing is it that God deals with sinful human beings like you and I to feed us with the hidden manna every time we come to his word, every time we come and pray every time we come and worship we see wonderful things in the law.

[39 : 24] There are so many other things that we could refer to. You remember the lifting up of the brazen serpent and how Christ referred to that, that he had to be lifted up in the same way.

the shadow of the cross is there. There are so many wonderful things throughout God's law that it is a never-ending source of knowledge and blessing to us.

And we see that David later on in the psalm says, in verse 162, he says it's like finding great spoil.

You only find great spoil when you search for it. You have to search for it. It's very rare that you come across it by accident.

But it does happen sometimes. It does happen. And sometimes you may get a blessing from someone or somewhere that you weren't expecting. But most of the time it's when you search for blessing, when you come to worship, when you come in prayer, that the blessing occurs.

[40 : 45] It doesn't mean that there will always necessarily be a blessing. For 40 years, the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness through their own rebellion.

love. You remember, of course, that it refers so often to the journey to the promised land. How often do we use that symbolically as well?

we are we are still in the wilderness here, but we are journeying to the promised land. But we can only get to the promised land through the mediator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and the atonement that was rendered on the cross at Calvary.

this should be our prayer every day. Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

It's the prayer of the believer, but it also should be the prayer of the unbeliever. If you're listening this evening and you still haven't come to faith, then this can be your prayer too.

[42 : 02] open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of law. And the most wonderful thing that you could behold is the glory and the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless to us these meditations on his word. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word this evening.

We thank you for being able to meditate a little on the wonderful things contained in your word. And we pray that you would open our eyes to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in all that he has done for his people.

We pray for any who are struggling with their faith, that you would open your eyes, open their eyes to see the King in his beauty. Be with us now and take us safely home, if it be your will.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let us conclude then by singing in the verses that we read in Psalm 119 at the beginning.

[43 : 15] I think we'll just sing the first four verses. Down to verse 4 as the time has passed. Psalm 119 on page 399. Blessed are they that undefiled and straight are in the way, who in the Lord's most holy law do walk and do not stray.

You'll see the connection between this and Psalm 1. How Psalm 1 is almost a sermon on Psalm 119. So we'll sing down to verse 4.

Blessed are they standing to sing. blessed are they that undefiled and straight are in the way.

Who is the Lord's most holy law do walk and do not see.

Blessed are they who do observe his statutes of incline and who do seek the living God with their whole heart and mind.

[44 : 58] Such is ways to walk and they do know in equity there was come and lead us to keep thy grace and glory in grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever.

Amen.