

The Stranger's Prayer

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[0 : 00] Psalm 119. And I'll read the first 19 verses of Psalm 119.

! I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

I will obey your decrees. Do not utterly forsake me. How can a young man keep his way pure by living according to your word? I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord.

Teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees. I will not neglect your word.

[1 : 31] Do good to your servant and I will live. I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth. Do not hide your commands from me.

Please keep your Bibles open to Psalm 119. I see that God has kept you alive another week.

Given you life and breath and everything else to sustain that life. And with that breath you got up and you went to school. Maybe you went to the park. You went to work.

What was your reason for living? For doing what you did? Last week we began to draw lessons from this longest of chapters in the Bible.

Psalm 119. What we believed to have been written by David. And we started with the second to the last verse of the chapter. Verse 175. And we did so because if we are to understand this man whom God says is a man after my own heart.

[2 : 43] Then we need to know what makes him tick. What his driving motivation. His singular purpose in life is.

And that's what he tells us here. Let me live. That I may praise you. This is why he wants to live and be spared from all those dangerous attacks upon his life.

I want to live that I might praise you. Is that your reason? That you want to live? Do you have a reason to live that's big enough to take in everything you do all week long?

No. It's not enough just to live. Want to live to live. Maybe say it's better than the other option to die.

No, no. We need some reason to live. Something that will get us up every morning with a purpose.

A goal. In our lives that day.

[3 : 45] Well, David lets us know his reason to live is to praise the Lord. You know, that's the happy occupation of heaven. It's begun on earth.

We just shared in it together, didn't we? It's shared by those who are going to heaven. We're being prepared for that happy occupation, which is to praise the Lord.

To speak well of him and to live for his praise, his honor and glory. Now, we went to other Psalms of David to see what it is that he gave thanks to the Lord for.

But if we stick to this Psalm alone, we notice that there is one central thing for which David praises the Lord in this Psalm.

Notice what it is in verse 164. Verse 164.

[5 : 12] So, David is saying that seven times a day, all throughout the day, I praise you for your righteous laws. It was the atmosphere he breathed.

He breathed in praise and he breathed out praise to God from morning to night. Even at midnight, I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws. Verse 62.

So, God's word is clearly the theme of Psalm 119. And God's word is referred to under about 10 different names. Here it's his laws, his words, his promises, his precepts, his judgments, his decrees, his commands, his statutes, his rules.

All of them forms of God's word. And so, God's word is the theme that dominates the whole of the psalm, which is an alternating between petitions and praises.

And that's the way the whole psalm goes through. Petitions followed by praises. And the focus of both is upon God's word. The longest psalm, the longest chapter is clearly in praise of the word of God.

[6 : 30] How often do you praise the Lord for his holy word? Seven times a day? Or once in seven days?

I trust Pastor Jeremy's Sunday school class has raised our praise to the Lord for this book.

It is a standing miracle, is it not? A wonder of wonders. That this God of whom we've just sung, who created me and everything else in this world, has not only noticed us on this little planet we call Earth, but he's actually spoken to us in human language, that we can understand his thoughts, his ways, his gospel, his laws.

All breathed out by him, so that what the Bible says is what God says. Without air. Preserve for us today.

David clearly sees something about God's word that keeps him lost in wonder, love, and praise to God for it. What is it? Why can't he stop praising God for his righteous laws?

[7 : 53] Well, he tells us in this longest psalm, and it's going to take several weeks to unpack, all the reasons that David mentions praising the Lord, why he praises the Lord for his word.

We're going to begin today. Why does David praise God for his word? Because it's the only safe guide to heaven. This is the only map to get you there.

And for that, we should be praising the Lord at all times for this book. Now, we see this in verse 19, which is our text for today.

It's what I'm calling a stranger's prayer. Listen to David's desperate desire for God's word and why it is so desired by him.

Verse 19, I am a stranger on earth. Do not hide your commands from me. There's just two points this morning. David's self-description is the first.

[9 : 01] He describes himself. What does he say about himself? He said, I'm a stranger on earth. A stranger. Kids, what's a stranger? Well, some of you don't know.

It's a foreigner. It's somebody that doesn't belong here. He's in an unfamiliar place. Indeed, he's in a strange place, not his home. I don't know if you've ever been a stranger in a foreign land.

Someplace you'd never been before. And the language is different. The customs are different. The road signs are different. It's all so strange to you. You can't understand it.

And if you've been in such a place, then you know how David felt. He says, I am a stranger. But notice where David is a stranger.

Now, David had lived in many different places. He was very familiar with the hills of his boyhood, Bethlehem, where he watched over his father's sheep. And he knew the mountains and the forests of Judea, where he fled from Saul and his army, even going into foreign lands to escape Saul's hatred.

[10 : 16] And then as king, he knew the comforts of palace life in Jerusalem. But listen to him. He doesn't say, I'm a stranger when I'm in Egypt. I'm a stranger in Moab. I'm a stranger up in Assyria.

No, he says, I am a stranger on earth, on the whole planet. Nowhere on earth was David truly at home, not even in Bethlehem or Jerusalem.

He could sing that chorus that we sing, this world is not my home. I'm just a passing through. That's David's self-description. That's his self-conscious identity.

I am a stranger on earth. He was fully aware of it. Are you? Are you aware of it? Because in one way, we are, all of us, what David was.

We are strangers on this earth. This world is not our final home. Every last one of us are just traveling through this world to our eternal home, be it heaven or be it hell.

[11 : 31] All of us are strangers on earth, moving to our final home. Where are you going? Where am I going? We're all traveling, you see.

We're all moving through. We can't stay here. This earth is destined to fire, 2 Peter 3. So to live is to travel. When we die, we arrive at our final destination.

Life is short. Eternity is not. Be sure of your destination. Now, you and I showed up on earth the day we were born into this strange planet.

Think of a little baby just born into the world. It's also strange to them, isn't it? Did you know 150 years ago, if friends came calling to see your newborn, they might say, can we see the little stranger?

They knew his identity. He's just a little stranger. Their only home has been mother's womb for nine months.

[12:42] Just when they were getting comfortable, they were dropped down into this world. What a strange place. Everything's new. Everything's different. And we enjoy seeing these little ones, don't we?

They're curious and discovering this strange world and what it's like. They don't know it yet, but they have been dropped down into a strange world where the most important thing in their entire life will be to find and travel the way to heaven.

Kids, nothing is more important to you in life than finding the way to heaven and traveling it. That you might arrive there. And meanwhile, you're traveling through this strange world as a stranger. Now, this world in which we have been placed is not like the world in the beginning. No, in the beginning, it was paradise. When God made the first man and woman, theirs was the only perfect marriage.

Eve had the only perfect husband and Adam had the only perfect wife. The perfect environment. In harmony with each other and in harmony with God, fellowship with God, with the animals, with their entire environment.

[14:09] Perfect peace. Nothing to stir it up. Nothing to trouble it. All things contributed to their joyful delight. What a world they were dropped into. But that world is gone.

We live in a fallen world, a sinful, evil world, a world that is at enmity against God, a world in which God's curse is upon this world.

That's the world we're dropped into. And we feel like strangers here.

We need to find the way back to the Father's house. And it's this evil world that has complicated our search for finding the way back to the Father's house.

Now, think of it like the game of football. Let's say I'm trying to describe the game to someone that doesn't understand it, maybe a Brit that thinks it's soccer.

[15:13] And so I say, it's simple. You have this ball, and you have 11 players on your team, and the goal is to get this ball over the goal line into the end zone.

That's a piece of cake, he says. One other thing. There's 11 other guys on the other side of the ball that are doing everything legal and illegal to keep you from getting the ball into the end zone, to keep you from arriving there.

Oh, well, that's a different matter. That complicates the game. Exactly. And so does this fallen world complicate your ability to find and travel the way to the Father's house.

Whoever you are, however old, however young, it's a difficult task. Now, who are these enemies that are trying to keep us out of heaven?

Well, we start with the devil himself, a real person, a real fallen angel, a supernatural being, a spirit, created upright and he fell and rebelled and then he brought his rebellion to earth.

[16:29] He hates God with a passion and he's out to destroy all that is good and to pervert it, to twist it.

He hates God and he hates his people and he hates all people made in his image and he hates any praise coming to this God and so he's out to oppose mankind made in the image of God.

and so he came into the garden paradise under the disguise of a serpent and he spread his lies about the way back to the father's house.

Now, God had said to Adam and Eve, you're free to eat from any tree in the garden except one. You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

So, it was obey me and live, disobey me and die. That was the covenant God made with Adam in the garden. The good life, eternal life is found in obeying me.

[17:38] Satan slithers into the garden, finds Eve and starts slandering God and lying about what is good for Eve.

Has God really said you can't eat from any tree in the garden? You mean he's putting restrictions on you? He's limiting your freedom? Eve says, well, we may eat from the trees in the garden but not this one or he said we would surely die.

You will not surely die. God doesn't care a whit about you and your happiness. He just doesn't want you to become like him and if you eat, you will be wise as God.

all God's trying to do is to scare you and to manipulate you into being his servant. It was a lie, a lie from the pit of hell and Eve swallowed it hook, line, and sinker.

Didn't she? And then she ate the forbidden fruit and got Adam to eat it and together they brought death into the world and produced a fallen human race in rebellion against God and his commands.

[18 : 50] All of us. And so it's this devil you see that's on the other side of the ball. He's on the other side trying to keep us out of heaven. Trying to keep us from finding the way to heaven and he's still at work today.

He's still up to his old tricks. He doesn't need new ones. He's got new people that were just as gullible as the first ones if not more because we are now fallen creatures where Eve was not. And so he's still slandering the goodness of God. God is not so good. In fact I believe there's people in this room that have not yet surrendered their life to Christ because they're afraid if they do they'll lose their joy and happiness and pleasure in life.

You're believing the lie. The same lie that Eve believed if that's you. Jesus said to his hearers 2,000 years ago in John 8 44 you are of your father the devil and you want to carry out your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning not holding to the truth for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of lies and for thousands of years he's been spreading his lies filling the earth with lies about God about his goodness about the good life and about the way to eternal life in heaven how can we find our way back to the father's house and the devil's not alone he's got many helpers he's got demons the other fallen angels that are all serving along with the prince bells about but he's got other helpers than them he's got the world he's got this world this earth that you and I inhabit John the apostle says in 1 John 5 19 the whole world is under the control of the evil one he's the god of this age to see what people are worshipping to see what they're thinking about God it's all the same lies they're worshipping the creation rather than the creator who is blessed forever they're worshipping themselves you see the world has gotten into the wrong hands oh yes behind it all is

[21 : 27] God and his sovereignty but he has given this period this age for the devil to be the god of this age it will not be that way forever God will not have it so and the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven once again but it's a world born in sin and rebellion the inhabitants of this world are called the children of disobedience because they're following Satan in his rebellion against God their father is the devil and they bought into his lies and now they're doing his work for them they are now passing on the lies the world is lying for him so that the devil can stay behind the scenes and so the world just follows the herd it's like the Pied Piper and all the children are following the Pied Piper out of town and he's going to destruction but they think he's leading them to something good remember we're strangers in the earth traveling through this world needing to find our way back to the father's house but the world has changed all the road signs this one used to be a sign from God warning this way leads to hell and the world has come and taken down that sign and put up a new one this way to heaven they've changed the signs they call evil good and good evil they put darkness for light and light for darkness and bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter

Isaiah 520 they call abortion a woman's health care and bearing babies an inconvenience they call bondage to sin freedom to do what we want and they call the perfect law of freedom bondage they call homosexual relations good and biblical sexuality outdated!

passee too restrictive they've redefined everything the old terms don't mean what they used to mean and you see these are the lies the lies that are going on just follow your own heart God says he who trusts his heart is a fool but they've changed the signs you see that's the dominant thing today you know what's best for you follow your heart all religions lead to heaven pick whichever one you want or none of them the world says the gospel is foolishness God says it's the wisdom of God the world is changing all the signs replacing God's truth with Satan's lies to keep us out of heaven this is the world David lived in this is the world you and I live in we're strangers on earth and we need to find our way to heaven how do we find our way well according to Jesus there's only one way out of all the millions of ways because the

Bible says we each have turned to his own way so you got yours I got mine but they all are not God's way millions billions of ways to heaven individual people mapping out their way finding the way that looks good but Jesus says no there's only one way Matthew 7 the narrow road that's the

way that leads to life and few there be that find it most are on the wide road there's room on the wide road for everybody's ideas on how to get to heaven all of the lies of the devil over the thousands of years there's plenty of room on the broad road but they lead to destruction even though they think they lead to life the good life and it's not all just out there as if our enemies are Satan and the demons in this world part of the problem is right here

Proverbs 14 12 says there's a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to destruction you see our our minds gravitate to wrong ways rather than the right way we prefer the world's ways than God's one and only way and so we say hey this looks like a good path I like this path this will lead to the good life this will have a good outcome not knowing that it winds around and it ends up in hell but it seems good there's a way that seems good to a man but it's not good it seems!

[26 : 39] right but it's not right we all have ways that seem right to us but aren't right how do we know which is which and then Jeremiah says by nature our hearts are deceitful above all things desperately sick who can understand them so we're easily deceived by others by the devil by the world by ourselves into taking wrong paths to get to heaven do you see the dilemma of every stranger on earth this is the problem it's no easy thing to find and travel the one right way to heaven in the midst of all the wrong ways leading to hell and here's the thing you only have one life to live so you better get it right the first time there are no do overs there's no second chances so you need to be sure the first time because this life is the only time you will have to get it right so that's the problem for us strangers on earth and that's what leads to the strangers prayer verse 19 continues

I'm a stranger on earth do not hide your commands from me this is just a stronger way of saying show me show me the way don't hide the way from me open my eyes to see the way reveal the way to me don't hide your commands from me I can't do without them I'm lost without them does he sound desperate he is and I'll tell you why because there is only one place in this lying deceiving world to know the way back to the father's house there's only one place to find that way it's in the word of God alone his commands his promises his precepts his written revelation to us without it Lord I'm lost forever don't hide it from me oh please show it to me please reveal that way to me order my steps in your word oh Lord don't hide your commands from me children do you know the story of Hansel and Gretel I'll leave it to your teachers to decide whether you want to read that to them preferably not at bedtime there's some scary parts to it but children it's a story of over 200 years old told to children all over the world Hansel and Gretel were children of a very poor woodcutter and their mother died and father remarried and they were so poor that their step mother convinced their father to take the two of them deep into the forest and to abandon them just to leave them to themselves going far into a strange forest how would they ever be able to find their way back home well

Hansel clever Hansel had overheard the plan and so he filled his pockets with white stones and as he walked along with his father deep into the forest he would drop a white stone and another one all the way to where they were abandoned left all alone how are they to find their way back to the father's house it would be by following those white stones here's one gretel oh here's another one and another one and so they would make their way back to the father's house and they made it that's the spirit of the psalmist the stranger on earth he is he's in a strange world and there's nothing but lies going around about God and the way to heaven and he's saying how will we ever get to the father's don't hide your commandments from me here's one here's one here's another instruction from the

Lord here's his precept here's his prompt and so it's through the word of God that we find our way back to the father's house that's why he's desperate he doesn't want to take a step without the book of God and that's why he cries in this prayer I'm a stranger now if you can enter into David's desperation for the word of God as a stranger in a lying world then you'll understand why seven times a day David prays the Lord for his righteous laws verse 137 righteous are you oh Lord and your laws are right that's what righteous means it means being right right in the eyes of God everybody's doing what's right in their own eyes but you want to know what's righteous it's what God says is right and we have his right laws what's that worth having a

[32 : 22] Bible that is 100% right when all the other stuff in this world the lives of the devil are wrong and then verse 141 says your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true oh that's what I need in a world where everything else is false and lies and then verse 138 says the statutes you have laid down are righteous they are fully trustworthy trustworthy that means you can trust your life your eternity to what you find in this book you you'll never get anywhere in time or eternity and say

oh why did I follow that book it's it's fully trustworthy it's been tested it's been tried there's every person in heaven today has found it fully trustworthy they followed it and it's led them to the father's house so

David has got one chance to live and he's desperate to not miss the way home to not waste his life living for things that will be worthless one second after he dies you know judgment day will be full of people full of regrets for the roads they took in life why did we ever do this why did I ever go there why did I ever believe that why did I ever live for this many will wake up one second after death to find that they live for the wrong world it was one long mistake a mistake about the things that count and though they were daily drinking in the goodness and mercy of God while they lived yet they said leave us alone we have no desire to know your ways Job 21 15 and so they ignored God's word they may even have a Bible at home but they don't read it they don't meditate on it they don't search it they don't follow it as a man following the way home like Hansel and Gretel no ho-hum the Bible it's just another book not David don't take your commands from me is this my treasure worth more than gold and silver but if that's you neglecting the word going your own way finding your own way don't swallow Satan's lie you need not you have the truth you have the righteous laws the true laws the trustworthy laws the right way the true way the only trustworthy way that will not disappoint you

David had it he celebrates it and prays in verse 105 your word Lord it's a lamp to my feet and it's a light to my path you ever been in a forest in the dark you can't see anything about where you're going that's the picture here and David says I'm a stranger in the earth but your word Lord it's a lamp to my feet it's a light to you for your word it's the map leading me home to the father's high that's why seven times a day he's found praising the Lord for it now 200 years ago John Wesley had that same book and I believe he captures David's heart in our text I've read it before to you I'm reading it again because I think it could be written right over Psalm 119 verse 19 where Wesley says as David could say as a as a stranger on earth

I'm a creature of a day passing through life as an arrow through the air I'm a spirit come from God and returning to God just hovering over the great gulf till a few moments hence I am no more seen I drop into an unchangeable eternity I want to know one thing the way to heaven how to how to land safe on that happy shore God has condescended to teach that way for this very end he came from heaven he's written it down in a book oh give me that book at any price give me the book of God I have it here is knowledge enough for me let me be a man of one book you see David's heart throb in that I'm a man I'm a stranger on don't hide your commands from me that's my only hope and you here you have the book that

[37 : 35] Wesley had that David had I mean think of David his word of God was a lot slimmer than ours wasn't it and yet he praised the Lord seven times a day for the word of!

that means we ought to be praising God maybe 14 or 20 times a day because we have more of God's word so what are you doing with it ignoring it or devouring it as for your life as for your eternity believing every word of it no quarrels with God on any part you obeying it you ordering your steps being a doer of the word and not a hearer only deceiving yourself Jesus had a lot of followers and they heard the word of God coming from his lips and they put up with it for a while as long as the loaves were coming and miracles were flowing but in

John 6 a large crowd of supporters were following Jesus and this day he preached a sermon that would drastically thin the crowds they didn't like it they didn't like what the word of God was saying to them the living word Jesus bringing the truth of God's word to them and from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him they would not accept the word of God and Jesus turns to the twelve and says you don't want to leave too do you and Peter answers for the twelve and says Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life!

we know we believe and know that you are the holy one of God my friend if you don't believe God's word where will you go to find the only way to heaven this world doesn't know they're in darkness they've swallowed the lies of the devil where will you go if not to this book to find the one way to heaven Jesus alone has the words of eternal life you see Jesus is David's greater son and he came to earth a thousand years after David as to his human nature born of the seed of!

the! God the Son! stood with a body taking our nature and he stood on this planet and he made clear to one and all the only way to heaven said I am the way you see the way is a person it's not a list of rules it's not do this do that no it's me I am the way it's a singular way I'm the truth I am the life and no man comes to the father except through me it's the most exclusive word isn't it no one

comes to the father to the father's home except through me all other religions will take you to hell all other ways will not get you to heaven your sin is so offensive that it takes the eternal son of [41 : 19] God coming to earth in our flesh to be damned in our place in order to take away the offense of our sins to God that's the only way we can make it to heaven it's through Jesus and what he's done you know the devil's gospel it's much less offensive you mean everybody else other than those that come to Christ are going to hell that's exactly what Jesus means but here's the devil's gospel it's much less offensive you get to heaven by being good be a better husband and father a better wife a better mother a more obedient child a good neighbor just try harder go to church many good things there the golden rule ten commandments make them your rules for life and and you see as you do that your good deeds will outweigh your bad deeds and you'll get in you're just fine and the devil has preachers in pulpits this morning preaching that gospel but it's no gospel it's no good news at all it's the way that seems right to a man though seems right everything else is based on our merit that's how

I get a raise at work that's how I get an A in school must be how I get into heaven no the kingdom of God is counter cultural it's opposite to the way man thinks because no man ever merits heaven you come as a pauper as a beggar and you say God have mercy on me a sinner for Jesus sake and you're in you come through Christ you come through his atonement that's the only way neither is there any name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved if you're going to be saved you must be saved through Christ or not be saved for eternity it's a very exclusive message the one way to heaven through Jesus his merits not yours but then the Bible says it's also the most inclusive of messages because whosoever whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life whoever comes to me

I will in no way cast out he Christ is able to save completely all who come unto God through him because he ever lives to make intercession for us oh the inclusiveness of the invitation that's that's how I came I'm one of those whoever and that's how most of you here have come maybe somebody still on the works wagon you're trying to get in by being a better person oh hear me that's the devil's lie listen to the stranger's prayer don't hide your commands from me it teaches us the one way I am the way I am the truth I am the life it's only here in God's word that we meet this savior it's only here that we meet Jesus Christ no wonder David says seven times a day I will praise you for your righteous laws may we do the same let's pray father thank you for not leaving us as strangers in this earth thank you that you very early after the fall after there in the garden you spoke into that fallen scene and you promised to send a redeemer of God's elect the Lord Jesus Christ and to redeem Eve and her seed through the coming seed the Messiah we thank you that the Old Testament is full of your prophets who came to a back slidden people with the gospel Abraham had the gospel preached to him Galatians 3 says we thank you that that gospel has come with greatest clarity through our Savior in the New Testament and that we know that the only way that there has ever been to get back to the

Father's house has been through Christ oh that others would treasure that way and honor that way by embracing it for themselves coming to Christ pleading his mercy and so finding that forgiveness and the joy that David had that would lead him to praise you for your precious word so thank you we praise you in Jesus name amen