Finding your way ahead

Text: Psalm 119:105-112

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**Scriptures:** Psalm 119:105-112; John 1:1-13, 8:12

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 27, 67, 119:105-112, 466, 465

**Series:** Psalm 119

**Theme:** The illumination of God’s Word upon the pathway of life

**Proposition:** Christ alone enables us to find the way forward

**Introduction**

When you are walking at night away from street lamps when there is no moonlight, a head torch is really handy. It casts a pool of light in front of you which shows the way ahead. Such light allows the traveller to stay on the path and to negotiate obstacles like fallen trees, rocks and flooded areas. Without a torch, safe travel on a cloudy night can be very difficult and the probability of getting lost very high.

We come now to what is probably the best-known verse in the whole of Psalm 119. This one verse is a short summary of the main theme of this entire psalm. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*”. The Hebrew word translated for us as ‘feet’ is actually the singular ‘foot’. This beautifully conveys idea of guidance for every step of the way; one foot at a time. Like a torch beam which illuminates just enough to move confidently forward one step at a time.

There are some truths about spiritual light and darkness which are clear from Scripture:

* It is God who illuminates the darkness. “*God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness*” (Gen 1:4). Just asthe battery power source of the torch enables the light to shine, so God is the source of all spiritual light.
* This fallen world is a realm of darkness. “*Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19). Our natural spiritual environment is like a path at night below a dark cloudy sky.
* The Word comes from God who “*is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*”   
  (1 John 1:5) The Word is like the light beam which comes from the torch.
* The Word enlightens all who receive it and leads them to the God, the source of all light, life, truth, goodness, peace and joy. Like a weary tramper who is guided along the dark track into the warmth and security of an alpine hut.

Our psalmist is not tramping in the bush at night, but he is on a pilgrim pathway through this dark world. He is heading for the New Heavens and New Earth where: **“***… there will no longer be any night; and they (God’s people) will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever*” (Rev 22:5). The remaining 7 verses of this 14th section of acrostic psalm 119 teach us about the pathway which the light of the Word illuminates. This light is essential for those who would dispel darkness from their path as they travel to the place where they will live forever in the presence of Christ, the Light of the World. We are going to see that the way ahead in Christ is:

1. The pathway of commitment
2. The pathway of communication
3. The pathway of certainty
4. **The pathway of commitment**

A good rule to follow when walking in the New Zealand countryside is ‘always keep on the marked trail’. Our pilgrim Psalmist has decided to keep **only** to the Lord’s track. He has bound himself by oath to do so... v106 “I *have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules*”. Why the need for such a strong statement of personal commitment? Because the wise person knows that the natural fallen human tendency is to drift off-track.

The wise person heeds the advice of Prov 4:25-27 “*Let your eyes look directly ahead, and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil*”.

Why the need for such a strong statement of personal commitment? Because Satan uses the circumstances of our lives to repeatedly attempt to take us off-track. For our Psalmist, Satan was using human enemies to harm him: This is clear from earlier in the psalm:

* + *“princes sit plotting against me” (23)*
  + *“the insolent smear me with lies” (69)*
  + *“the insolent have dug pitfalls for me” (85)*
  + *“the wicked lie in wait to destroy me” (95)*

The pressure continues in this ‘Nun’ section: v107 “*I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to Your word*”. The suffering is very great; “I’m dying here, give me life again!” v109 “*I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law*”. ‘I am continually at risk from my enemies’. When we walk the Lord’s pathway, opposition increases. Behind each human enemy is the Devil; ultimately, our struggle is never against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12).

Satan intensifies his attacks when we bind ourselves to our Lord by a vow. v110 “*The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts*”. My enemies they “out-gun me and out-manoeuvre men. They seek to entrap me. They delight in my downfall”. Yet, I am still on track! because of the light of your Word on my path! Here is grace! Apart from God’s goodness we’d be lost in the darkness, and we would miss our way.

This pressured pilgrim is depending on God’s Word for life. He has sworn a solemn oath. Vows of commitment are pleasing to our God when genuinely made from a loving heart (e.g. 2 Chron 15:12-15). In New Testament terms, the psalmist is a person depending on Christ, the Living Word. He is a person committed to Christ by a vow. **“***If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*” (Romans 10:9).

This present age is very much one of commitment-avoidance. It is common for people today to keep their options open for a better offer. As a parent - try asking some young people what their plans are for the following week – they are often vague, fluid, and subject to change if a favourable text invitation is received. Many in our society do not marry, but just live together (no longer considered to be ‘in sin’), or delay firm commitment to each other. Many young Christian married couples delay having children; avoiding the financial commitments, so that they can build material equity. Some young believers are reluctant to join themselves to a local church and make a binding commitment to be a communicant member. Some stay loosely attached to the church, but never bind themselves to her. They never take a personal vow of membership.

Our psalmist had no such hesitation about personal commitment: v106 “I *have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules*”. This oath could be put into these words: “*Not My will, but Yours be done*” (Luke 22:42). You see, Christ has walked this pathway; always perfectly keeping the righteous rules of God His heavenly Father. Never straying to the right or the left. Bind yourself to Christ, take his yoke upon you and learn from him and He will guide you on the narrow straight path. He is the good Shepherd. He knows the way! He has gone before you and He has told you about His journey in His Word. Which brings us to our second point:

1. **The pathway of communication**

To have and maintain any human relationship- good communication is essential. This is marriage counselling 101! Listening, speaking carefully, and confirming understanding of what has been said/heard. This principle applies even more fundamentally to our relationship to God. Our Pilgrim Psalmist has active communication with his covenant Lord. Look at his plea in v108 “*Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules*”. Here is a transaction of words between a man and his God. The word ‘freewill offerings’ is used in the Old Testament for sacrifices which were spontaneously given. e.g. Lev 7:16; 22:18; Deut 12:6; as distinct from those stipulated in the law. Freewill offerings expressed personal confession of sin, thankfulness for answer to prayer, and consecration of oneself for service to the Lord.

Here the psalmist is praising His God from a heart of devotion. Also included in these freewill offerings of the mouth is prayer (cf. Ps 19:14) and preaching/proclaiming Christ. Just as “freewill offerings” built the material Lord’s house in the Old Testament when the exiles returned from Babylon (61,000 Darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, 100 priests garments), so, words about the Living Word, build the church spiritually. These offerings are individual, but are given in the corporate, collective context of the temple worship. So for us, the praises we give individually when we sing to the Lord are a means of communicating with Christ, the Lord of His Church. What a motivation to sing gustily! – to ‘lift the roof off’! There is also an encouragement here to sing at home; to prepare your freewill offerings of your mouth before coming to corporate worship!

Look at the beginning of the psalmist’s personal plea for a communicating relationship with His covenant God. “Accept”. This is a prayer, that God would be pleased with his offerings of praise. How can his, and our, praises - which fall short of perfect devotion - ever be received by our Holy God? Only through Christ. God receives us through His Son, because His own Son is in a perfect relationship of loving communication with Father and Holy Spirit. Because the beloved Son is acceptable and fully pleasing to His Father, so (as we are united in relationship to Jesus), we are acceptable as worshippers to our God. Our freewill offerings of praise are pleasing to our King. Because of Christ we are able: individually and together to: “*by the mercies of God, present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*” (from Rom 12:1).

See the desire to hear God speak to the Psalmist individually through His Word: “*teach me Your rules*”. For the Christian pilgrim: Christ is your Great teacher. His voice, His Word, is the primary source of instruction…. “the only rule of faith and life”. Hearing the voice of Christ illuminates our way, but also keeps us safe (John 10:27). Like sheep close to their protector shepherd, which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **The pathway of certainty**

Our pilgrim psalmist is a very wealthy man. Not by wages earned, but by grace. He has been given a non-material gift. “*Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart*” (v111). He possesses God’s Word.

Back in Old Testament times, God’s people were promised an inheritance from the Lord, the land of Canaan. Israel forfeited her right to this real estate, but all who are spiritual descendants of Abraham have the inheritance of Christ, the living Word, forever.

To have an inheritance in Christ as an adopted child of God is sheer joy. In his joy, the psalmist has inclined his ‘*heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end*’. The word “inclined” conveys the idea of stretching out, extending your heart. This expresses a deep desire to please the Lord. Notice the emphasis on ‘forever, to the end’. This conveys permanence, security, certainty. This is like these words of Christ about the security of His disciples who have certainty about their salvation. **“***I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*” (John 10:28-29) Walking by the light of God’s Word is the pathway to personal security, certainty and assurance in Christ.

Yet at times you and I may doubt; Does He really love me or does He not? On the topic of certainty, the Westminster Confession helpfully says (18.4) “*True believers may have the assurance of their salvation in different ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit; by some sudden or very strong temptation; by God's withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness, and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair”.*

Christ alone enables us to find the way forward. He says, *“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."* (John 8:12). To walk with Jesus is to move forward with every step directed by His Word. It is to live the whole of life in willing, thankful, obedience to Christ. In summary, the way forward is:

* The pathway of commitment
* The pathway of communication
* The pathway of certainty

Not many, if any, of us will be going for a walk in the dark this coming week, but all of us who are in Christ will be responding to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. May you and I be able to say for ourselves in this coming week and beyond: “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*” (v105).

AMEN.