

The Supreme Happiness of Believers Whose Lives Obey God's Word (Psalm 119:1-8)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on September 21, 2008

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I want you to please take God's wonderful Word and turn to Psalm 119 and our text this morning is the first 8 verses. Last week we introduced ourselves to this chapter, that I am calling "the Grand Canyon of Scripture's Greatness and Sufficiency" and if you weren't here last week, I would encourage you to get that message to orient yourself to the series we will be doing on this incredible psalm that I pray will change all our lives in some way.

I am excited and hope you'll catch it as we study this psalm verse-by-verse, one stanza each week, through the end of this year and the start of next year. If you see the heading "Aleph" in your Bible before v. 1, as we said before, that means each verse in the original language for v. 1-8 began with that same first letter of the Hebrew alphabet all the way down. Next week we'll look at the stanza of vv. 9-16, which has the heading "Beth" (and each of those verses began with that letter in the Hebrew text). As most of you are also aware, essentially every line in this psalm refers to Scripture by one of many synonyms (law, testimony, precepts, statutes, etc.).

Aleph.

- 1 How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.
- 2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
Who seek Him with all *their* heart.
- 3 They also do no unrighteousness;
They walk in His ways.
- 4 You have ordained Your precepts,
That we should keep *them* diligently.
- 5 Oh that my ways may be established
To keep Your statutes!
- 6 Then I shall not be ashamed
When I look upon all Your commandments.
- 7 I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
- 8 I shall keep Your statutes;
Do not forsake me utterly!

Happiness is the universal longing and desire of men and women in any culture in any age. Our country's Declaration of Independence said near the beginning: "We hold these truths to be **self-evident**, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed **by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights**, that among these are Life, Liberty and the **pursuit of Happiness**."

A self-evident God-given unalienable right to pursue happiness is part of the very founding and fabric of our society. As you're well aware, though, modern Americans pursue happiness in all the wrong places apart from God's instruction [it should be noted that many of the founders of our nation rightly understood that the pursuit of happiness was to be found in God and His Word]. Unfortunately, fallen man thinks happiness will come with the right wealth, or possessions, or respect, or the power to do what they want without constraints, or to find love that is unconditional. But in our sin-saturated world, sin-soaked, sin-sick world, much mere human happiness is short-lived, elusive, and sin manages to mess with even the best this life has.

This psalm is not *against* happiness. This *book* is not against happiness. In fact, it is written to increase our happiness, and to give us true happiness, or as the word “blessed” in v. 1 can even be translated: “supremely happy.” Not to be confused with the natural happiness of this world (dependent on what’s *happening*), this is an other-worldly supernatural joy in any circumstance, a joy in and from our Lord who says “These things I have spoken to you, that **my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full**” (Jn 15:11). “*These things we write you that our joy may be full*” (1Jn 1:4).

Full joy / happiness is possible, this psalm tells us from the get-go, and this is where it is found, in this book. And the psalmist knows it firsthand, as we read many different expressions of a man happy in God and His Word (if you prefer other words, they’re also here):

Delighting in the Word (v. 16)

Loving the Word with passion (v. 97)

God’s Word is the great **joy** of his heart (v. 111)

He **rejoices** at God’s Word (v. 162)

He’s more happy in God’s Word than gold or riches, etc.

The first two lines of Psalm 119 reiterate that this blessed (literally “happy” state) is to be found and pursued in God and His Word.

TITLE: The Supreme Happiness of Believers Whose Lives Obey God’s Word

OUTLINE:

1. The Double Blessing of an Obedient Lifestyle (v. 1-3)
2. The Duty of an Obedient Lifestyle (v. 4-5)
3. The Determination of an Obedient Lifestyle (v. 6-8)

First, the Double Blessing of an Obedient Lifestyle (v. 1-3)

You’ll notice the word “lifestyle” in each of the points today. That’s because the language of this stanza is about life patterns:

- the root words for walk (*halak*) and way (*derek*), common OT metaphors for the pathways of life appear 5x here
- In these 8 opening verses, there are also six occurrences of terms emphasizing obedience (hence “obedient lifestyle”)
- Those who know and study the Hebrew say the clear theme ‘of these introductory verses reveals itself to be life-style obedience ... similar to the relationship of Ps 1 to the rest of the Psalter; there is an introductory emphasis upon life-style obedience’¹

BLESSED – first word in v. 1 in the orig. text. It’s an exclamation of happiness, so some translations have “*How blessed*” or even “*O how blessed*” – an emphatic expression. One paraphrase has “*How rewarding is the life*” or it could be “*what supreme happiness*”! This is a deep divine delight, a godly God-given happiness, a deep-seated joy from God to those in relationship with Him, whose chief goal is to glorify God and also to enjoy Him (incl. in His Word).

Verse 2 also begins with the same word. It is repeated for emphasis – there is a double blessing on those who walk in the law of the Lord. They are doubly blessed. But notice verse 2 tells us it is a wholehearted seeking. Not half-hearted begrudging passion-less religion. This psalm will often speak of how the whole heart and affections and delight for God and His Word are what cause him to meditate on Scripture which he loves supremely and rejoices in.

These first two verses have been likened to two door-keepers that welcome us to this psalm, and they really summarize the dominant message of Psalm 119 – that there is a supreme happiness (not to confused with superficial happiness of unbelievers), there's a *joy of the Lord* that is the strength of those who love and live the Word.

These blessed ones in Psalm 119 are introduced as undefiled or blameless, and that word “blameless” is used of those who like Job avoid or shun evil. Their way is God's perfect way, not the world's way. With that in mind, listen to how the first two verses of the entire book of Psalms begins:

Psalm 1:1-2 How **blessed** [*first word in entire book of Psalms*] is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 Nor stand in the path [*way – same word as in Ps 119:1*] of sinners,
 Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

²But his delight is in the **law of the LORD** [*also used in Ps 119:1*],
 And in His **law** he meditates day and night.

This is how the entire book of Psalms begins, with this first word “blessed” or “supremely happy.” Psalm 1 states the truth negatively, while Psalm 119 states it positively, but it is the same essential truth that both begin with: happiness / blessedness is here!

This very word “happy” or “blessed” is not only the first word of the Psalms, and this great Psalm, it is also how the first sermon of Jesus begins in the New Testament, with this same first word *blessed* in the original language, a word for supreme happiness:

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

This clearly transcends the normal usage of happiness. Most of our world would think it is those rich in material things who are happy – Jesus says it is the poor in spiritual things who are supremely happy. This word for spiritually poor is literally a poverty when it comes to spiritual value or accomplishments. Jesus is talking of those who not only are, but recognize they are spiritually destitute, spiritually bankrupt, lowly spiritual beggars who are so pathetic and helpless that they can't even work, their only hope is for the kindness of others to give to their empty hands. The world would say the key to a happy and fulfilled life is a high self-esteem and thinking highly of yourself – Jesus says it starts with thinking lowly of yourself spiritually in light of who you are and who God is. It's realizing you have nothing and are nothing apart from His grace, your best righteous deeds are filthy rags to God. You have nothing to bring, nothing to offer, all you can do is beg for Someone else to give what you don't have. Jesus is saying, “that is the only type of person who is going to heaven” (the v. can literally read “*theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven*”). It's only those who recognize their lack of accomplishment or value or goodness or effort of their own. No one will be in heaven who has not come to that place of self-emptied repentant faith.

Jesus goes on to say, the blessed, the supremely happy ones, are those who mourn over their sin, and who are humble, and who hunger and thirst for a righteousness they do not have. That's what marks those who are going to heaven, who will inherit the new earth, who will see God, who will be in the kingdom, and so on. The double-blessing is repeated in multiple ways by Christ.

The first word of the gospel is the same as the first word in the book of psalms, the worship book of Israel. It is the first word in Psalm 119, which extols the blessedness of God's Word, and in every case this supreme happiness can only be found in those who have experienced the salvation of God and His divine blessedness.

Psalm 32 also has the same first word and further develops why we have such supreme happiness, and it is again spiritual in nature, not material possessions. I want you to notice that the first two verses of Psalm 32 begin with the same word as the first 2 verses of Ps. 119, pronouncing a twofold happiness, a double blessedness

Psalm 32:1-2 (NASB95)

¹How **blessed** is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!
²How **blessed** is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

In Romans 4, when Paul wants to prove salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord alone, he goes to the Psalms as well as the first book of Moses. Paul did not see a great discontinuity in God's dealings in the Old and New Testament, with Jews and Gentiles, although God does have a specific plan for both, as Romans 9-11 explains. But when it comes to salvation, Paul's argument in proving how we are saved is by showing how people were always saved. The way he proves how Gentiles in the church age are saved, is by showing how Abraham was saved, even before the Old Covenant law was given, and how David was saved who knew and loved the law (but even as the man most after God's heart was unable to keep the law).

Romans 4 (NASB95)

¹What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."
... ⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED."
... ²³Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, ²⁴but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

I felt it was necessary to take that time to see where else the word BLESSED appears, because the supreme happiness that this psalm talks about is only possible for those who have been redeemed, regenerated and rescued from sin by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, based on Scripture alone, and for the glory of God alone. And the obedience it calls for can only be empowered by regenerated hearts that desire God and His Word

‘This repetition [also beginning v. 2] calls attention to the fact that those demonstrating a pattern of consistency in obeying God’s directives for life correspondingly experience a deeply rooted joy ... The faithful of all ages experience a transcendent joy internalized, a happiness defined by God’s standards and values, not by the worlds.’²

WAY is commonly employed as a metaphor for life’s roadway
BLAMELESS characterizes their faithfulness along that “way”

God is the source and example of the blameless way:

- Psalm 18:30 says God’s “**way is perfect**” (same 2 words as Psalm 119:1, blameless can be translated “perfect”)
- Psalm 119:1 also ties in “the law of the LORD” with this perfect way, which is what Psalm 17:7 says “the **law of the LORD is perfect**” (same word translated “blameless”)

When this word for “perfect” is used of imperfect humans, it means “blameless” referring to their character or integrity.

Job 1:1 “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was **blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.**”

Job as an imperfect human being feared God, and his life was not free from evil, but it was marked by turning from evil. He shunned evil rather than loved it. His character was upright by God’s grace, and he was a repentant worshipper of God from the beginning to the end of the book, even though he did sin in the book for which he repents at the end of the book of Job.

The KJV translates this word for “blameless” as “undefiled” which speaks of it more negatively, but the original language term has a thoroughly positive connotation, that one has translated as “having integrity as a manner of life.” No glaring blame or reproach of life.

2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all *their* heart.

OBSERVE – or obey, to keep, or guard faithfully, again a reference to characteristic or pattern of the truly happy man.

WHO SEEK HIM – notice the shift. It is *Him*, not just *His* Word by itself that the psalmist ultimately seeks. The purpose of getting to know the Word of God is to get to know the God of the Word. You will notice throughout this psalm as we go, that there is a very natural flow between the Scriptures and God Himself, praising God for His Word, and prizing His Word, which is so inseparably joined to its Author, so that the psalmist interchanges equal expressions of affection and love for the Lord as well as His law.

³**They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways.**

When it says they “do no unrighteousness” it doesn’t mean they don’t sin, which the context of the psalm is clear, and scripture is clear there is no such person who never sins. This is not the common or general term for sin, but a term for injustice or wickedness, or even “violent deeds of injustice” (BDB, 732).

Those who seek God wholeheartedly, who strive to obey His Word and walk in His ways will not be known for those types of wicked and unjust or unrighteous deeds but will instead be known for walking in God’s Word as the habit or pattern of their life.

1 John 3:19 says “No one who is born of God *practices* sin” – that is not the lifestyle of practice or habit of those who have a new nature from God and who love God and His Word from changed hearts that strive to walk in God’s ways and repent when they fail.

Now not only is there a double-blessing on obedient lifestyles, but #2 The DUTY of an Obedient Lifestyle (v. 4-5)

I like the NJKV of v. 4 “**You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently**” (or the NIV has “to be fully obeyed”). There is a duty that is to flow out of our delight and blessed happiness.

The problem with the Pharisees and legalists is they try to keep precepts without that heart behind it. It was man-produced and man-powered and man-pleasing instead of by, through, and for a God they loved. And they like to multiply man-made precepts on top of Scripture. Spurgeon said, ‘God has not commanded us to be diligent in *making* precepts, but in *keeping* them. Some bind yokes upon their own necks, and make bonds and rules for others: but the wise course is to be satisfied with the rules of Holy Scripture, and to strive to keep them all, in all places, towards all men, and in all respects.’³

Why? “You *yourself* have commanded.” “You” is the first word in Heb. and emphatic because it is also included in the form of the verb.

The psalmist cannot just talk about God’s Word in the abstract for very long or of God in the 3rd person for very long with personally addressing directly His personal Lord. Watch this:

v. 1b “...the law of the **LORD**”

v. 2a “**His** testimonies” (personal pronoun now, 3rd person)

v. 2b “Who seek **Him**” (moves to Himself personally, not just His Word, they seek Him personally)

v. 3b “They walk in **His** ways” (3rd person used 3x)

v. 4 “**YOU** have ordained **YOUR** precepts” (2nd person)

From here on out, most of the rest of this psalm becomes a prayer. This is remarkable, and we will see the pronoun “YOU” or “YOUR” about 250x in this chapter. This is a Godward, God-focused, God-loving, personal, prayerful, worshipful psalm written by someone in love with and in relationship with YOU, O LORD.

Very few comment on this movement of language, but we see a similar phenomenon in the most famous Psalm (the 23rd)

¹The **LORD** is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²**He** makes me lie down in green pastures; **He** leads me beside quiet waters.

³**He** restores my soul; **He** guides me in the paths of righteousness

For **His** name’s sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I fear no evil, for **You** are with me [**not “He” is with me**];
Your rod and **Your** staff, they comfort me.
⁵**You** prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
 My cup overflows ...

It happens so naturally, and seems in both psalms to be in the moment when he senses his need, that he just spontaneously goes right into prayer. This is not just a set “prayer time” in the morning for him, or saying grace before a meal, then not talking to God the rest of the day, The psalmist cannot go very far without praying. He can’t address his fellow man in writing very long without addressing God Himself. He can’t talk very long *about* God without talking *to* God. That is a very practical example I really am convicted by. May that be the same with me and with you as well (I pray this Psalm will help that problem in me). May we not be able to read God’s Word or books about God’s Word or talk about God or His Word without wanting to worship and pray and praise. How can we get there? Pray more like this psalm.

⁵**Oh that my ways may be established To keep Your statutes!**

Not only has the language for God progressed, but the writer’s sense of personal responsibility and duty has grown, and he prays for divine help to establish or direct *my* ways in God’s ways. There is also a shift in the language about man’s individual obligation.

- v. 1 “How blessed are **those**” (plural 3rd person) – v. 2 same
- v. 3 “**They**” 2x (again plural 3rd person, speaking of others)
- v. 5 “Oh, that **my** ways may be established” (not we, **me**)
- v. 6-8 “I” used 5x in 3 verses

In verse 5 this man sees his duty, as well as his desperate need for divine help if he will fulfill his duty. Man’s responsibility and God’s sovereign provision for our responsibility are balanced here.

Spurgeon again says it well: ‘We cannot of ourselves keep God’s statutes as he would have them kept, and yet we long to do so: what resort have we but prayer? We must ask the Lord to work our works in us, or we shall never work out his commandments ... it is a cry of weakness appealing for help to one who can aid ... it is a petition of faith from one who loves God and trusts in Him for grace ... [He] confesses that even for the smallest part of his duty he felt unable without grace. He longed for the Lord to influence his will, as well as to strengthen his hands. We want a rod to point out the way as much as a staff to support us in it ... We should have more keepers of the statutes if we had more who sighed and cried after the grace to do so.’⁴

This passage has shown us the double-blessing of Obedience, and the duty of obedience in vs. 4-5, now in closing I want you to see

#3 – The Determination of an Obedient Lifestyle (v. 6-8)

We don’t have to spend as much time today developing this point, because we will see it over and over again in the passages we study in the verses ahead, but look at the last 3 verses of this stanza:

- 6 **Then I shall not be ashamed** [*he is determined not to be ashamed*]
When I look upon all Your commandments. [*his determination is to be able to look at all God's commands, not just his favorite ones, not selective, hit-and-miss, but God's whole counsel*]
- 7 **I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,** [*he is determined to praise God, and not hypocritically, but from a true heart*]
When I learn Your righteous judgments. [*he is determined to keep learning and not content or complacent, he's a constant student*]
- 8 **I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly!**

He is determined to keep God's statutes, but notice the final line of this stanza, which is somewhat surprising, almost foreboding in its plea against utter forsaking or abandonment "*Do not forsake me.*"

This is very important. We have a problem. With all this talk about obedience, even the best of men cannot obey as God demands, which is "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Galatians 3:10 says "cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law"

If we do not continually do all God calls us to we are under a divine curse, deserving damnation eternally according to the Judge of the Universe, deserving because of our sin to be forsaken utterly. We can ask God not to forsake us, we can try our best to do better at obeying the Bible than we have in the past, but on what basis can we have the confidence that we will not be eternally damned or cursed or forsaken eternally, when we have already violated His law so many times? When you understand how holy God is and how much He hates sin and that His pure and perfect nature demands that ALL sin must be punished by death (both physical and eternal separation), and that God cannot have anything sinful in His presence, cannot look on any sin, and that our good deeds of obedience can never outdo or erase the sinful crimes we have committed against God the judge Himself, how can this prayer be answered "Do not forsake me utterly"? How can we know He won't? The answer is not fully given in this portion of this psalm, but there is another key occurrence of this same phrase in another Psalm that I want you to turn to: Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 is a psalm written by David, but it is also inspired by the Holy Spirit with words that you may recognize that go beyond the life of David and receive their ultimate expression in another place.

Ps 22:1a My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

One translation (NET) has "abandoned me" – Heb. *Eh-li, Eh-li, lamah, azab-tah-nee*; or in Aramaic, *Eloi, Eloi, llama sabacthani*

1b Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

Alt. translation for "far from my deliverance": "why are you so far from saving me?" (ESV, NIV)

The word for *groaning* is literally “roaring” as KJV has and the word in other places refers to the roar of a lion - conjures up images of a roaring creature, like a primal scream or howling haunting cry of an animal! The best lexicon of the Hebrew language (HALOT) defines the word in this context as meaning “screaming” – another has it as a cry of great distress.

2 O my God, I cry ... [also a term sometimes translated as shout or scream, or at least a very loud and intense cry or shout]

⁷All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, **they wag the head, saying,**
⁸“Commit *yourself* to the LORD; **let Him deliver him;**
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”

By inspired scripture, these words would be more fully applied to a coming Son of David who would be born in the city of David and would hear these words not far from the temple site where the original Son of David built a temple. These words are prophetic

¹⁴I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.
¹⁵My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They **pierced my hands and my feet.** [*Amazingly, these words were written hundreds of years before the crucifixion form of execution was used by the Romans*]
¹⁷**I can count all my bones.** [*usually in crucifixion, the bones of the legs were broken, but not in the case of Jesus who was already dead*]
They look, they stare at me;
¹⁸**They divide my garments among them,**
And for my clothing they cast lots.

Matthew 27 (NASB95)

³⁵ And when they had crucified Him, **they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots ...**
³⁹ And those passing by were **hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads** ⁴⁰ and saying, “You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying, ⁴² “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³ **“HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM;** for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ” ⁴⁴ The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words. ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour **darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.**

This darkness represents God’s judgment on sin on the cross, the weight of sinners on the shoulders of the Son of God. It’s as if God turns out the lights on what He cannot look upon, and it is at the end or at least the climax of the placing of our sins on Christ and the pouring out the cup of wrath for sin on Christ, that we read:

⁴⁶ About the ninth hour **Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”**

The writer of Psalm 22 and Psalm 119 may not have fully understood this, but this is the fullest human emotional expression about forsaking ever uttered, the fullest measure of feeling of God’s furious frightening abandonment – the result of this event provides the basis for the answer of the cry recorded in the Psalms.

This is the real horror of Calvary – something Mel Gibson could never portray in any movie – not the physical pain, but the spiritual alienation and the degree of abandonment felt of a Son by His Father in the most unspeakable and unimaginable act that Isaiah 53:10 refers to as God crushing His own Son! What caused this cry of Christ was not nails or thorns, it was not even the rejection of mere men or the human enemies, but for the first time, because of sin upon Him, in His humanity He feels rejected by His own loving Father, and there’s a sense in which He is, which I can’t fully fathom but which the cross fully expresses and which makes us fully uncomfortable, if not shocked. Instead of the infinite love they had shared with each other since before time began, now Jesus is feeling the infinite wrath of infinite God in all its fullness and furiousness and ferocity and force toward sin like my sin and yours

Jesus here cries out in His loudest voice into the darkened heavens at the top of His lungs, what some would call in OT language a scream, a shout or cry deep from His soul, a pouring out of His heart in unbearable unparalleled human agony and anguish at the unfathomable and unmitigated wrath of the Father toward sin. Jesus knew no sin, He had no sin of His own, but *my* sin and your sin in all its wretched ugliness, was being punished by God Almighty in this sickening scene. We are the sinners who should have been there, we are the ones who forsake God, and would continue to forsake Him if not for the cross. We are the ones who have to pray like Ps 119:8 for God not to forsake us this way.

It is because Jesus cried these words “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” on the cross – it is precisely because of that event that we who are in Christ can know that we will not be utterly forsaken by God! The answer of the prayer of Psalm 119:8 is secured for all believers because of what Christ did on the cross.

He took the place of all the redeemed, He is our substitute, our representative, bearing the wrath of God we deserve, the full fury and forsaking of the Father that we all deserve to experience right now and for all eternity. Without severing the mystery of the Trinity, there was a real relational forsaking felt by the Son, there was for the first time, a break in the fellowship enjoyed from all eternity, as the Father who cannot look on evil, has to look away from His Son who has become sin-bearer, and who in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21, Jesus “became sin for us” – it is hard for human words to even define it, but we must not deny the reality of the substitutionary sacrificial nature of the cross.

This bloody atonement of our Lord was a real vicarious legal punishment that actually redeems. The horror behind those genuine words expressed in full human emotion by Christ are precisely the basis for the good news, the best news – that we do not have to face that horror if Jesus is our Lord and we are trusting in Him as taking our place in bearing our punishment for our sin.

If Jesus is not your Lord today, and you die separate from Christ, you will face that horror, that forsaking and fury of wrath, and it will not just be for a little while but for all eternity. But you don’t have to – you can flee to Christ today, take refuge in Jesus alone. Turn from your sins and trust Him alone. And you will be able to say like David in Psalm 16:10, using the same word *forsake*, “You will not forsake [or abandon] my soul to hell Sheol”

If Jesus is your Lord today, be freshly amazed by His grace, praise Him for His grace today. Think of it -- the words Jesus cried with a loud voice, that scream of supreme human agony receiving divine wrath, that should have been our anguished cry! We deserve the fury of the Almighty that caused those agonizing words to come forth from the lips of Jesus.

Those words should have been our agonizing scream at the moment of receiving God’s fury and forsaking to the lake of fire forever and ever for our many sins. If God’s Word is true, and it is whether you agree with it or not, we all deserve to be damned, we all deserve to be accursed for our sin if we do not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law – that’s what Galatians 3:10 says. But Galatians 3:13 says “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” I should be condemned, but in my place condemned He was

C.J. Mahaney summed it up this way at the Resolved Conference last summer in one of the most powerful sermons I’ve ever heard: “This scream should not be His scream. [Jesus] is holy, He is sinless, and yet in this moment, He screams what Dr. Sproul describes as ‘the scream of the damned,’ [or as Galatians 3:13 says, ‘He became accursed for us’ and He hung on the tree at Calvary like a cursed or condemned criminal before God. Jesus cries out] the most agonizing protest ever uttered on this planet, it burst forth in the moment of unparalleled pain ... and Dr. Sproul adds, ‘for us!’ Oh, don’t just contemplate this scream [Mahaney pleads with us] or overhear this scream -- recognize that this scream was for sinners like you and me ... I deserve, because of my sin, to experience eternal punishment for my sin, weeping and gnashing of teeth, the scream as described here, as I encounter the justified wrath of God for my sin. This scream should be MY eternal scream!

He takes upon Himself my sin, the wrath I deserve for and against my sin. He screams the scream of the damned for me so that – so that I might sing instead!!

He screams, and by God’s grace and because of His sacrifice on the cross for my sins, and because of this I get to sing! ... He screams, and we get to sing! He screams the scream of the damned and I get to sing “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive glory and honor and power and blessings!” He screams, and because of His scream, I am freed from the divine penalty I deserve for my sin, and instead, because of His scream, I am assured of forgiveness of sin. I am assured that I will never be forsaken by the Father. And I am assured that by God’s grace I will see the face of the Father, and by God’s grace ... I will be singing throughout eternity ... and if you have turned from your sins and trusted in the Savior ... you will never be forsaken.”⁵

Far more important than the words of any man is the words of our Lord Himself to His people, some of the most beautiful words in Scripture which I hope are now even more beautiful to you – Jesus said “I will never leave you nor **forsake** you.” He won’t abandon His own, or as some translations have it, “I will never desert you.” Praise the Lord he prayer of Psalm 119:8 “Do not utterly forsake me” is answered in Hebrews 13 if you have been changed by His grace. If you have been saved by His grace, be amazed by His grace, let Him be praised for His mercy that will not forsake you.

It’s not because of us, it’s not on account of us, it’s not because we are so great. 2 Samuel 12:22 “the LORD will not **forsake** His people, **for His great name’s sake**” – it’s for the sake of the name, which is another way to say it was not ultimately for our sake, but for God’s, because His name is great, not us, because of His glory. Let that humble you, dazzle you, and make you supremely happy before the splendor of God and the Scripture that reveals his mercy

The hymn we will sing in closing speaks of the firm foundation we have as saints of the Lord in God's Word if we have fled for refuge in Christ, trusting in Him alone, and if you haven't done that yet -- flee to Christ today, my friend, confess your sins and confess Him as your Lord, so that you never have to face the wrath of God Almighty. Those who have truly surrendered their life to Jesus Christ, the song says even if all the powers of evil or hell might endeavor to shake, our Lord will never, no never, no never, no never, no never forsake. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

¹ George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, p. 65.

² *Ibid.*, 68.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, Hendrickson, n.d., 3:144.

⁴ Spurgeon, 3:144.

⁵ Resolved 2008 General Session #11, available at www.resolved.org