

Praising the Sufficiency and Supremacy of Scripture (Psalm 119:161-168)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on March 29, 2009

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“THE BIBLE contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you

It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here Paradise is restored, Heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

CHRIST is its grand subject, our good the design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.” – Author Unknown (printed in introduction to Gideon’s New Testament)

Psalm 119:161-168 (NASB95) ¹⁶¹ Princes persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your words. ¹⁶² I rejoice at Your word, As one who finds great spoil. ¹⁶³ I hate and despise falsehood, *But* I love Your law. ¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous ordinances. ¹⁶⁵ Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble. ¹⁶⁶ I hope for Your salvation, O LORD, And do Your commandments. ¹⁶⁷ My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly. ¹⁶⁸ I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You.

At the beginning of our study, we called Psalm 119 “the Grand Canyon of Scripture’s Sufficiency,” and as we have journeyed through the panorama of wonders and majesty and the grandeur and greatness and bigness of God revealed in this chapter, I hope your heart echoes the words of v. 161 across these canyon walls: “... *my heart stands in awe of your words.*” The supremacy of Scripture, its supreme value and satisfying and superior character should leave us at times speechless, awestruck, and awe-inspired.

Albert Einstein has been quoted as saying: “He who can no longer pause to wonder, is as good as dead.” If you have not and do not wonder at God’s Word, you may very well be spiritually dead and need God to regenerate you.

One thing that stands out in this stanza in contrast to those we’ve studied before is that there are no petitions, no requests to God. This whole passage is amazed praise to God for His amazing Word. Here are some of the petitions from recent sections:

v. 144b “... give me understanding”

v. 145 (next stanza) “I cried with all my heart; answer me”

v. 146 “I cried to you; save me!”

v. 153 (last week’s stanza) – regard me / “look”, rescue me

v. 154 – “plead my cause [i.e., represent me] and redeem me, revive me” (also repeated in v. 156b and 159b)

But in today's passage he doesn't verbalize *asking for something*, he verbalizes *awe, admiration, amazement, astonishment, absolute* "shock and awe" before the God who would condescend to give us poor sinners such a book as this, a book so sufficient for all of life, so supreme and supremely satisfying as it shows us how to fulfill our purpose on the planet: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

The reason for this change of tone is not that his worries are gone (v. 161a still has princes persecuting him) but his worries have been lost in wonder, his petitions have been consumed in praise, his anxiety replaced with awe. It's certainly appropriate at times to pray petitions / request for our spiritual life and true needs but there should also be times when we pray simply to praise God (v. 164 "7x a day I praise you") for His grace and truth.

Seven Results / Blessings of Being in Awe of God's Word

1. Trembling at the Word (v. 161)

Princes persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your words.

In the KJV the Heb. "awe" is translated "fear / afraid" its other 24x
In the NASB it is also translated as coming in *dread* or *trembling, shaking, being terrified*, in light of something awesome in the true deepest sense of the word (like the "awe" of seeing lightning strike a few hundred feet from you). This Heb. root is also in v. 120:

¹²⁰My flesh **trembles for fear** of You, And I am **afraid of Your judgments**.

Judgments there is a synonym for God's Word, as virtually every verse in this psalm contains a synonym for God's Word. This fear (we can use the word "trembling" for this first point) is not only directed toward God but toward His Word as well. We are not to fear man, Scripture repeatedly says, even those who can harm the body like the princes who he says were persecuting him in v. 161, but we are instead to fear the King of Kings before whom all princes and every other knee will bow and confess He is Lord.

When Jesus (who John 1 calls the Word) came to earth, the gospels frequently use similar language in response to His words / works:

Luke 5:26: They were all **struck with astonishment** and began glorifying God; and they were **filled with fear**, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Luke 7:16: **Fear gripped them** all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!"

Luke 8:25: They were **fearful and amazed**, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"

God is glorified by amazement, astonishment, and fear filling or gripping people in response to the Word of the Lord when they recognize that the One behind those words is the Lord Himself.

The greatest fear of this man of God who wrote Psalm 119 was not what man had to say, but what God had to say. Not how man might mistreat him, but he feared how he himself might mistreat or mishandle God's Holy Word. He dared not trifle with the Bible's contents, he trembled at its contents. This is the mark of the godly:

Isaiah 66:1-2 (NASB95) ¹ Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?" ² "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word ... ⁵ Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word ...

Where are those today who tremble at God's Word? There are plenty of feel-good churches -- we need more *fear-God* churches! Many are flippant with God's truth -- we must fear God's truth.

- **Isaiah** trembled at God's Word (Isa. 6) at the thought of him an unclean human speaking the Holy Word of a God who is Holy, Holy, Holy. Isaiah trembled and cried "woe is me." We should too.

- **Ezra** spoke of those who "trembled at God's Word" as the godly in his day (Ezra 9:4 "*everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled*" ...

Ezra 10:3 calls for repentance "*according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God...let it be done according to the law*"

- **Moses** hears the Word of God from the burning bush and we read: "*Moses said, 'I am full of fear and trembling.'*" (Heb 12:21).

- **Daniel** heard the Word of God through a messenger in Dan. 10, and he says in verse 11 "*while he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling*" – far cry from today's so-called prophets.

- **Jeremiah** received the Lord's word to preach judgment, his whole body shook inside and outside at the enormity and implications of the task for that generation: "*My heart is broken within me, All my bones tremble ... Because of the Lord And because of His holy words.*" (23:9)

- **Habbakuk** received God's Word and wrote (Hab. 3:16): "*I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble.*"

Where are those today who tremble at God's Word? There are many preachers who trivialize it, so contextualize it, sanitize it, and minimize it. It's no wonder many churchgoers don't take the Bible seriously when their pastor doesn't seem to. Those who shook the world in the Reformation only did so because the Word first made them shake and tremble before it. The Reformers didn't fear the Pope but the pulpit made their knees knock because of the sacred Word. Luther was often said to tremble because of God's truths.

The Scottish Reformer John Knox when he felt called to preach the Word, in anticipation of it, locked himself in a room and wept for days, trembling at the gravity and seriousness of being 'called to this holy task, he was broken in his spirit and continually in tears over the awesomeness of such a calling and his unworthiness. And God used him to influence his nation and beyond.'¹

- **Paul** described his own ministry of the Word (1 Cor 2:3-5) as "... *in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*"

Israel as a nation received the Word of God from Sinai beginning with the Ten Commandments and after #10, we read (Ex 20:18-20) “*they trembled and stood at a distance ... Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid ... God has come in order to test you ... the fear of Him may remain with you [before you], so that you may not sin.’*”

There’s a type of fear we are NOT to have (self-centered fear that paralyzes us so we do nothing) but there is a type of fear we are to have (God-centered healthy fear of God Himself that keeps us from sin and motivates us to obey reverently God’s *Holy Word*).

Isa 8:12-13 “You are not to say, ‘*It is a conspiracy!*’ ... to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of *it*. “It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear

The “awe” of Ps. 119:161 has been called “a holy reverence or godly fear – a loving trembling of the heart ... [like Cranmer who] in 1555 was martyred, yet had a profound reverence for the Word, he wrote much about. Speaking to his students he said –

I would advise you all, that come to the reading or hearing of this Book, which is the Word of God, the most precious jewel, and the most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that you bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof, not the vain glory of frivolous disputation, but to the honor of God, increase of virtue and edification both of yourselves and others.”²

³⁸Establish Your word to Your servant as that which produces reverence for You

Awe for God’s Word results in trembling at it, now the 2nd blessing

2. Joy in the Word (v. 162)

¹⁶²I rejoice at Your word, As one who finds great spoil.

Jay Adams writes that this word for “spoil” refers to plundered treasure: “Typically, it would be hidden or buried somewhere. Here, the picture is of one coming upon such a ... large and very valuable treasure. Such a find (Captain Kidd’s buried treasure, for instance) would make a person very happy ... rich overnight ... In this Book are treasures that are greater than riches untold. They are treasures that cannot be lost, that will not pass to another, that one can carry with him when he dies!”³ v. 14 “*I rejoice in the way of Your testimonies as much as in all riches.*”

Treasure and gold usually is not found without hard work and diligent searching, and the same is true of God’s Word. The spoil or plunder from battle in ancient times had to be fought for. The word “spoil” to ancient man communicated wealth, power, satisfaction, influence, and happiness, and the rejoicing mentioned here brings to mind a jubilant celebration of soldiers cheering after battle, raising the spoils above their heads for others to see.

Spurgeon wrote:

‘contention for the truth of God was greater than all the trophies that can be gained in war. Grace divides greater spoil than falls to the lot of sword or bow. In the evil times we have to fight hard for divine truth: every doctrine costs us a battle. But when we gain a full understanding of eternal truth by personal struggles it becomes doubly precious to us. If we have unusual battling for the word of God, may we have for our spoil a firmer hold upon the priceless word!

Perhaps the passage may mean that the Psalmist rejoiced as one who comes upon hidden treasure for which he has not fought, in which case we find the analogy in the man of God who, while reading the Bible, makes grand and blessed discoveries of the grace of God laid up for him — discoveries which surprise him, for he looked not to find such a prize. Whether we come by the truth as finders or as warriors fighting for it, the heavenly treasure should be equally dear to us.’⁴

Christ Himself described the gospel with the image of a treasure in a field, more pure and precious than gold or even a pearl of great value, and because of its supreme worth, it says *because of his great joy in it*, a man goes and sells everything that he has to buy the field, not just for the sake of the field, but for the treasure there.

Proverbs 2 ¹ My son, if you will receive my words And **treasure my commandments within you**, ² Make your ear attentive to wisdom ... ⁴ If you **seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures**; ⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God.

Where your treasure is there your heart will be also. Do we treasure God’s Word, rejoice in His Word as unspeakable riches?

Ephesians 3:8 (NASB95) ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles **the unfathomable riches of Christ**,

Paul as an unworthy sinner never got over the unfathomable uncountable unattainable unexplainable riches found in this Word which made him rejoice with a joy unmatched and unsurpassable

Colossians 3:16-18 (NASB95) ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ **richly dwell within you [and the results will include joy in all of life and all you do]** ... singing with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father.

If this Word richly dwells within you, it will produce more joy in you, which can be measured by your thankfulness through the day.

Which brings us naturally to the third blessing of awe for Scripture

3. **Love toward the Word (v. 163)**

¹⁶³ I hate and despise falsehood, But I love Your law.

If you rejoice in God’s Word as great riches or treasure, and truly believe it has priceless precious value, you will love God’s Word:

¹²⁷ Therefore I love Your commandments Above gold, yes, above fine gold.

¹⁴⁰ Your word is very pure [lit. *refined like gold*], Therefore Your servant loves it

If we believe Paul that “All Scripture is inspired and profitable ...” (before NT written) then we should love all of it, cover-to-cover. And as strongly as we love God’s truth (v. 163b) we should equally hate and despise all that opposes God’s truth (v. 163a). May we deplore and abhor all error because we adore God’s truth.

4. Praise for the Word

¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous ordinances.

Notice that the praise here is for, or because of God's righteous Word. His prizing of God's word in v. 163 led to his praising of God's Word. We all will praise what we prize.

There is abundant reason to praise the Word abundantly in Ps 119:

- v. 9: it helps a young person keep his way pure
- v. 11: it helps all of us not sin as we hide it in our heart
- v. 25: it revives us, gives us life; v. 26: teaches us; v. 27: gives understanding; v. 28: it strengthens us; v. 41: brings salvation; v. 45: freedom; v. 49: hope; v. 50: comfort, etc.

Do we ever praise God for His Word? Do we praise Him 7x a day? Have we even praised Him one time in 7 days? In the past week since Monday how often have you praised God at all? How often have you thanked Him for His Word? Do you ever thank God for His precious priceless Word?

“seven times” in v. 164 signifies perfect or perpetual praise, complete or continuous in Hebrew thought. Rather than 7 prescribed times for prayer, most believe this is a permeating prayer without ceasing, an attitude and heart of thankfulness that is always on the tip of our tongue, the back of our mind, and the natural overflow of our heart

We talked about the familiar verse “pray without ceasing” a couple weeks back – the verse right before and right after it helps me understand what that looks like.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NASB95) ¹⁶ **Rejoice always**; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ **in everything give thanks**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

We of all people should be the most thankful because we have been blessed so much, and we have the entire Bible readily available to us to read (unlike most everyone in world history)! And we can gather each week to hear God's Word preached without having our lives in danger (unlike many in the world)! We should be giving God constant “praise for His Word”

5. Peace from the Word

¹⁶⁵Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.

We've seen the blessings of God's Word here include love, joy, peace – sound familiar? The fruit of the Spirit begins with those as well. Being Spirit-filled and Word-filled are closely related ideas.

A simple chorus that brings some of the same key words together:

I've got **peace** like a river in my soul.
 I've got **joy** like a fountain in my soul.
 I've got **faith** like a mountain in my soul.
 I've got **love** like an ocean in my soul.
 I've got Christ as my Savior in my soul.

The prophet Isaiah had much to say about peace, beginning with and flowing from the Messiah, “the Prince of peace” (9:6). Isaiah 26:3 says “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You.”

Isaiah 66:12 says the Lord extends peace like a river. As we sang, when that peace like a river attends our way, we are able to say in the most difficult storms of life “it is well with my soul.” In v. 165, this is not only peace, but *great* peace for those who love God’s Word despite great difficulty. The 2nd half of v. 165 explains that those with this great peace will have nothing that causes them to stumble – circumstances cannot trip up or destroy this peace, which is supernatural and surpassing human explanation. Philippians 4 promises peace that transcends all understanding for those who put into practice God’s Word and dwell on God’s Word.

6. Hope through the Word

¹⁶⁶I hope for Your salvation, O Lord ...

We have studied this concept of “hope” before in Psalm 119, so we don’t need to spend as much time here, but just remember “hope” means “confident expectation, trust, patient waiting.” We don’t hope in ourselves, our hope is in what God has said and is and does

‘observe the prepositions with which hope is linked in the Bible. We read that people hope *in* God or Christ (a dozen references), God’s steadfast love (Ps 33:18; 147:11), God’s word (Ps 119:81, 114, 147; 130:5) and the promise of God (Acts 26:6). Biblical writers set their hope *on* God (Jer 14:22; 1 Tim 5:5), Christ (Eph 1:12) and “the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed” (1 Pet 1:13 NRSV). They hope *for* God’s salvation (Ps 119:166) and a future restoration from exile (Jer 31:17). We also read about the hope *of* God (Jer 17:13), the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6), sharing the glory of God (Rom 5:2), glory (Col 1:27), salvation (1 Thess 5:8) and eternal life (Tit 1:2).’⁵

So biblical hope is centered on God and His Word and attributes. Unlike how we use “hope” in English, biblical hope is a certain assurance of what we do not yet have, but in confident trust we wait for it. This is the hope a believer has in salvation, a security, an assurance of salvation because the Lord has saved him and changed him and is producing obedience in his life (v. 166b).

It is through the Word that we have hope, not through our works, but our assurance can be increased by God-produced works in our life, which will tie in with our last point of obedience. Assurance of salvation should never prevent obedience -- it should prompt it.

¹⁶⁶ I hope for Your salvation, O Lord, **and I do Your commandments.**

Spurgeon says his ‘hope was fixed upon God, he looked to Him alone for salvation; and then he endeavored most earnestly to fulfill the commands of His law. Those who place least reliance upon good works are very frequently those who have the most of them: that same divine teaching which delivers us from confidence in our own doings leads us to abound in every good work to the glory of God. In times of trouble there are two things to be done, the first is to hope in God, and the second is to do that which is right. The first without the second would be mere, presumption; the second without the first mere formalism.’⁶ Both are essential.

7. Obedience by the Word

¹⁶⁷My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly.

¹⁶⁸I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You.

Knowing that all our ways are before God and His all-seeing gaze is a great motive to obedience, as this last verse says. Perhaps an even stronger motive is seen in v. 167b: he loves God's Word exceedingly. The more we see the exceeding riches of the Bible, the more our will love exceed measure, and exceed expression.

This is the third time in our stanza he speaks of his love for God's Word. It's not hard to respond to what or who you love, it's the most natural thing, and true love for the Lord and what He says will naturally result in our responding to what He has said to us.

John 14:15 (NASB95) ¹⁵“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments ...

²¹“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” ... ²³ ... “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. ²⁴“He who does not love Me does not keep My words ...

Jesus could not be more clear: this is a salvation issue. Not that obedience makes someone a Christian, but Jesus said obedience *marks someone* who's a Christian. I cannot assure you of the hope of salvation in v. 166 if verses 167-168 are not true of your life, not perfect obedience and perfect love for the Word, but a pattern of your life. If that is not the direction, the desire of your heart, you need to take your spiritual pulse because it's very possible you don't have any spiritual life at all and never have. In John 8 Jesus said those who abide in His Word are His true disciples, and those who love Him keep His Word (not perfectly, but they purpose to).

2 Thessalonians 2:10 speaks of many who will perish eternally because they “did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” Love of God's Word is equated with salvation there. Those who have no delight in God's Word are referred to as unbelievers.

Jeremiah 6:10-12 (NASB95) ¹⁰To whom shall I speak and give warning That they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed And they cannot listen. Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them; **They have no delight in it.** ¹¹ ... I am full of the wrath of the LORD; I am weary with holding *it* in. “Pour *it* out on the children in the street And on the gathering of young men together; For both husband and wife shall be taken, The aged and the very old.

Judgment falls on those who do not love and listen to God's Word.

Believers do not always love it and delight in Scripture as much as they should, but if any man truly loves the Lord, there is a love he will have for what the Lord says, and there will be a desire to love Christ more, and obey more of what Christ commanded us.

If you have never truly loved the Lord and His Word, I urge you to come to Christ and plead with Him to be your Savior and Lord and love of life. Be willing to give up everything, sell everything to have Jesus as your treasure, who you delight in as your all and all.

- Tremble at His Word as a lowly sinner and beg the Lord to have mercy on your soul through the work of Christ on the cross.

- Let all rejoice that His Word proclaims the unfathomable riches of Christ and renounce your earthly ambitions for this true treasure

- Love the Word more because of the God of the Word
- Praise the God you love for His supreme and sufficient Word and its many blessings, including peace from the Word and hope through His Word. And commit by God's grace to obey all His commands which are for our greatest good and His greatest glory.

1 *Rediscovering pastoral ministry : Shaping contemporary ministry with biblical mandates* (Edited by John MacArthur, Dick Mayhue, and Robert Thomas). Dallas: Word Pub, p. 147.

2 Herbert Lockyer, *Psalms*, p. 606.

3 Jay Adams, Counsel from Psalm 119, p. 132.

4 Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *The Golden Alphabet*.

5 *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 399.

6 Spurgeon, *Ibid*.