

Psalms 19-06-27a

This is the 27th of June, 2019. We continue our study in the book of Psalms, specifically in Psalm 119. We're gonna do the M&N's.

That's what little kids call those candies sometimes, M&N's. But this is the main and the noon section tonight. It begins in verse 97 of Psalm 119.

And we have now come to the 13th and 14th letters of the Hebrew alphabet, Mame and Nun. And we'll see the significance of that as we move forward. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and then we'll begin.

Father, it's a wonderful blessing. It's a wonderful challenge. It's a great opportunity for us to gather and spend this time looking closely at the content of this portion of your word together.

We thank you for its preservation. We thank you for the truth that it communicates, that is powerful and life-changing. We recognize it as one of the few things on this earth that can actually transform us from within.

And it is a tremendous gift that has been given to us through your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for him and for his ongoing ministry of representation and intercession on our behalf. And we ask that as we learn these things from your word tonight, that they will become a part of the resources in our soul and help us to reflect the Lord Jesus on this earth and to accomplish your purpose for us until that time when he comes to take us to himself.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Our study, as I said, resumes tonight after looking at the Lamed section last time in Psalm 119, which consisted of two or four. The letter L is the preposition that means two or four in Hebrew.

And so we saw this, it's of course, in symbolic terms is the shepherd's crook. That's what the Lamed is. It has an exaggerated shape in the Aramaic alphabet, but it started out in the old Semitic alphabet as the shepherd's crook.

And it has the idea of being led, having instruction, being guided and so on. And we certainly saw that last time because of the establishment of God's truth and the service that it renders to us in terms of that guidance. So we're going to pick up tonight in verse 97 with Maim.

And verse 97 begins, "Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. You, through your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation." How many times have you had that feeling when you're sitting in school? Well, I'm smarter than all my teachers. Maybe you haven't had that experience, but it's usually a symptom of unwarranted confidence in your own understanding. "I have more understanding than all my teachers." So what is he really talking about here? We'll need to find that out in verse 99.

Then in verse 100, "I understand more than the ancients because I keep your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep your word. I have not departed from your judgments, for you yourself have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through your precepts, I get understanding. Therefore, I hate every false way." Well, as usual, it would take a little bit of concentration and a little bit of work to get past what seems to be sort of ordinary and self-evident statements here.

It ends up with, "Through your precepts, I get understanding. I hate every false way." Well, we would like to believe that of ourselves. We would like to believe the beginning verse, "How I love your law.

It is my meditation all the day." But what is it actually communicating here? It becomes clear when we take a look at it a little bit more closely. First of all, this strophe, this section, this piece of eight verses here, is a hymn of praise for the law of God in all of its synonymous references. But it is extolling the truth of God's word, the revelation of God.

We have a lot of hymns that, "Oh, how I love Jesus," or, "Holy Spirit, light divine, glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." And we have a lot of hymns of praise. This is a hymn of praise to God's word. And we always run away frantically from the idea that we are bibliolators or we're worshiping the Bible instead of the God of the Bible and that sort of thing.

Because we are a Bible church and we pay very close attention to the text because it's like Jesus told his generation, you search the scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life. Well, that's true. And if you do it right, that is where life is to be found.

And we'll see that in this hymn of praise. But this is one of the few sections of Psalm 119 that does not have an appeal. There's no request made in here.

Remember last time when he said, in the cough section, he said, save me. And he says in the next one, deliver me. We saw these very strident appeals.

He says, help me in verse 86 of the cough section. And he says, save me in the corresponding verse of the Lamed section. So we have no such appeal made, no request in this one.

It is strictly going to be the effect that God's word has on the Psalmist, on us, so to speak. What is the potential effect it can have on you and on me? And we think, well, I already know that. Well, maybe you do and maybe you don't.

We're going to investigate what the Psalmist says in this section about it. Now, this is the M section, the Mame, which is the preposition in Hebrew. When you put it in front of something, it means from.

I've told you many, many times that if you want to take a verb and turn it into a noun, like

Shafat is the Hebrew verb that means to judge. And if you want to make that judgments, you want to turn to judge into a noun, judgments, you put an M in front of it and it becomes M'shafat or Mishfat, Mishpat. And the Mishpatim are the judgments.

And they're referred to several times in these sections we're looking at tonight, God's judgments. And as a synonym for the law, as one of the aspects or facets of the law, what does judgments bring to your mind? We're talking about the word of God, but we're specifically looking at it under the vocabulary term judgments, the judgments of the Lord. So put your thinking cap on for a minute and think, now, what would judgments emphasize in terms of thinking about God's word? He mentioned some several times in here.

I, in verse 102, I have not departed from your judgments for you yourself have taught me. And we saw them in the Lamed section a number of times as well. So why judgments? If it's the word of the Lord, we know that it's truth, right? This is timeless truth.

This is moral truth. This is the expression of righteousness. So as an expression of righteousness, I'm giving you a few clues here.

What does judgments stress? God's judgments. It's an evaluation. It is a measurement against a standard.

In my judgment, that board is warped and I'm not going to buy it at Lowe's to make my deck because I don't want to have to nail one end and pry the other end trying to make it straight. I make a judgment. I make an evaluation.

Now, what's another, what happens in court? They've added Court TV to the broadcast panoply out of Tulsa. And they said, re-scan your channels and you can see Court TV. So I re-scanned my channels and Court TV came up and I've seen a little bit of it.

I like to have something going in the background when I need a distraction. And I was actually taking apart and putting together a carburetor and I just needed something to take my mind off my misery. So this thing was going on.

But in the context of court and juries and judges and prosecuting attorneys and defense attorneys and witnesses and such, what is a judgment? When the process is finished, there's been a verdict, right? And that is the application of the law. So when you see judgments in Psalm 119, this is the truth of God's word, His righteousness expressed in terms of application. The emphasis is on its application.

You take the truth of God, you take the righteousness of God and you make application of it. This is a judgment. Somebody brings strange fire before the Lord, there's gonna be a judgment.

Not supposed to do that. You're not authorized. You're not designated.

You've not been given that assignment. You have a different assignment. But you're trying to take somebody else's assignment and there's going to be a judgment.

This is the application of God's righteousness and God's justice, God's law to a particular situation, judgments. Whenever God judged people in the Old Testament, sent the Israelites in to wipe out the Amorites or judged the world by a mighty flood, this is the application of God's righteous standard to a particular situation. The meditations of men's hearts are only evil all the day.

Well, there's gonna be a judgment. This is the implementation of God's righteousness in a specific situation. It is application.

That's important because we're gonna see this as a central idea in our section here. So the strophe here, this section in verse 97, begins, oh, how I love your law. All day long, it is my meditation.

Now, I will tell you that in the main section, meaning from, because you take a verb like Shabbat to judge and you say from judging comes a judgment. So from Shabbat comes Mishpat, judgments, Mishpatim. So these verses are going to begin in many cases with the word from.

This first one, however, is going to depart from that a little bit because it is going to start with the Hebrew word that means how. It has the idea of an extent. And so ma is a interrogative in Hebrew and it has the idea of what with a question mark.

Remember when the first day that God fed Israel in the wilderness and he said, get ready because in the morning you're gonna have bread from heaven. And they went out there and they said, ma-na, what is that? Ma-na, and that's what they called it, manna. Manna is ma-na, what is that? But the ma part of that is what with a question mark.

So it comes to mean all kinds of what's. It can be how or how now or whereby, wherewith, by what means, because of what, the like of what, how much, how many, how often, how long, but it has an interrogative idea. So we say, oh, how I love Jesus or oh, how I wish I had a V8 or something like that.

We say, oh, how, we don't think of it in terms of a question. This is an interrogative introduction and it introduces this entire section. And so the question here is, remember there's a little saying or poem that says, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways or how now, brown cow? And it's a question, right? So this ought to be, in my view, punctuated a little bit differently.

Instead of, oh, how I love your law. And it's sort of a platitude or an expression that doesn't seem very deep, but this is saying, do you want to know how I love your law? How do I love your law, question mark? I'll tell you how I love it. And the rest of this stanza is going to be the material ways that this love is evidenced, that this love is shown.

Remember the old campfire song, we are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord. And we pray that our unity may one day be restored. They will know, and the chorus is, they will know we are Christians, how? By our love.

They will know we are Christians by our love. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, Jesus said, how? That you love one another. Well, if you say, I love God's word, well, are there manifestations of that? You're manifesting one tonight by taking a chunk out of your Thursday to spend time looking at God's word.

You do that on Sunday, and that's one of the ways. But this is a question. So you can put a question mark at the end of this line, and you can take out the O, there is no O. There could be an OY, O is OY, like OYV in Hebrew.

Well, there is no OY here. This is, how do I love your law? Question mark. How or how much? Or to what extent? To what purpose? All of these are legitimate meanings and often translations of this single word, ma, M-A-H.

Why do I love your law? How do I love your law? To what purpose do I love your law? Why do I love your law is a good translation. So that's the beginning. And we're going to expect now that this is going to give us some answers to that question.

And so we can ask ourselves the question right at the beginning. If anybody said, well, do you love the study of God's word? Do you love God's truth? Do you love the things you learn in the Bible? Your knee jerk response would be yes. But if you want to test and find the proof, it is one thing to say, I'm going to work out.

It is another thing to work out. It's one thing to say, I'm going to lose five pounds before summer. And it is something else to do it.

We can have an intention. We can have a belief about ourselves, but is it really true? So how we can ask ourselves, how do I love God's word? Are these things true of me? Well, the first response to his self-addressed question here, how do I love your law? And he is saying this before the Lord. So there's no cheating on the answer.

You can't stand before the Lord knowing that he knows all of the thoughts and intents of the heart. He knows our innermost secrets. There's no kind of a fan dance you can do in front of the Lord.

So the psalmist comes before God and he is talking to God. Second person pronoun, how do I love your law? You think about somebody that you love in your periphery, a relative or a close friend, your spouse or a child or a parent. And you think, if you were talking to them and said, you know how I love you? And then you might list how that love expresses itself.

There would be some sacrificial things that you do or some links that you put yourself to, some material expression, some overt evidence of that love. You wouldn't just say you love somebody

the way you say I love pizza or I love Mozart. It's going to be more than just a kind disposition.

It is going to be manifest in action. So how do I love your law? The psalmist addresses God. He says, well, number one, I meditate on it all day long.

And in Hebrew, the word order here is how I love your law all the day, it is my meditation. So the first word in the sentence is how, how much, why? The last word is my meditation. So all the day, it is my meditation.

And this word, *citate*, it's actually *citate*. It is a musing, a reflection, a devotion. In some cases, it is, this word is used for a complaint, but it's an issue that is on your mind.

If you have something that is on your mind all day long, you can do other tasks, right? But in the back of your mind, you're still chewing on this thing. It keeps coming up to the surface and it's a frequent, if you have a worry, this can be a worry, but it's something that you just, because it is valuable to you, you can't go very long without it coming back to your attention. It's more than meditation where you sit down and sort of think deep thoughts.

It just is on your mind. All day long, your law, your Torah is on my mind. Now, what would that mean for us? How could God's law be on our mind all day long? Well, I have to concentrate.

I can't be thinking abstractions and be so heavenly minded. I'm no earthly good. And so I just think about it, send up the occasional prayer, but most of the time I'm just living the life here, right? What if we looked at every task, every expenditure of time, every new direction we move in the day, and just took a second to say, now, how would God have me do this? This was the original idea behind the, what would Jesus do? Bracelet that was a fad a while back.

And in concept, there's nothing wrong with that. If the Lord Jesus was mowing this lawn, mopping this floor, washing this car, attending to this task of my employment or this chore for the family or this necessary thing that is a part of my schedule today, what should my attitude be? Can I do this mundane thing as unto the Lord? Whatsoever you do, this is the verse that my dad wrote in the flyleaf of my Bible when the family, all the parents and grandparents, and there was quite a few sets of grandparents. Everybody signed my Bible and put a verse in the front.

It was one of these that you can take apart and put a notepaper in. And all of my six or eight grandparents, they're signed the flyleaf and then my folks signed it. And my mom put her verse out of Jeremiah about the sweetness of God's word, which is reflected in this stanza.

And my dad put whatsoever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. And whatsoever you do, do it as unto the Lord. So it can be sort of an interesting challenge to say, well, I mean, I've thought about this when I was a Marine and I had to shine my boots for an inspection or I had to do these seemingly inane chores sometimes.

But well, I mean, this is a little bit of a stretch, but if the Lord Jesus had asked you to do this

particular thing, whatever it is, how motivated would you be? How careful would you be? How diligent? How much attention to detail? Would you do it half baked? Lord hands you a pair of boots and says, I need these shined. How well are you going to shine them? Just making a bed, vacuuming a floor. If the Lord Jesus had asked us personally to do it, with what intensity and enthusiasm and motivation would we do it? I would want the Lord to come back and say, I have never seen a pair of boots shine like that.

I've never seen a floor this clean. I've never seen a bed that I could not just bounce a quarter off of. I could bounce a silver dollar off of this thing.

Well, that's the idea. If you love God's word, it is going to be on your mind to the extent that you're going to try to be making that application, that judgment about its pertinence in every different phase of the day, making a meal, eating a meal, cleaning up after a meal, whatever you do during the day. So you get the idea.

It is on my mind is the best way to reflect this word. And there's an intensity implied here. And so now when you go to the next verse, we're going to expect another answer to this question.

How do I love your law? Well, first of all, it is on my mind all day long. Secondly, through your commandments, you make me wiser than my enemies. You through your commandments make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever with me.

And this is not what it says in Hebrew at all. I'm going to give you the Hebrew word order here because it begins again with the letter M and the word it is attached to is enemies. Enemies.

We were talking about oy and a cry of complaint or distress. Well, these are the oy vay. These are, when you say oy vay, it's like, wow, something not good is happening.

Well, something not good is translated here as enemies, but this is from oy vay basically, from my oy vay. I would not personally translate this enemy. You think about when a person that speaks Hebrew or Yiddish says oy vay, this is like, oh my goodness, or something a little stronger.

It's not a pleasant surprise. It's not a pleasant situation. And this says from my oy vay.

And this is a singular. There's a particular cry of distress situation here and something is coming from it. So I would say from my distress, enemies can certainly cause distress, but we say, well, I don't really have any enemies.

My situation is different. Well, does your situation make you say oy vay? Then this is talking to you. From my distress, the next word is you, and this is the Lord, second person, you make me wiser.

From my distress, you make me wiser. And the next word is through your commandments. Now, how does that sound? From my distress, you make me wiser through your

commandments.

My troubles end up enhancing my wisdom quotient. And how does that happen? Through your commandments. So we're in trouble and we might think, well, oh God help, or Jesus save, or Lord fix this situation.

But the Psalmist says, wisdom doesn't come from simple deliverance and being yanked out of the frying pan. From my distress, you make me wiser through your commandments. So it is by finding the application of God's word in that distress, that's where we gain wisdom.

This is practical wisdom. This is Chakam, Chakam is to be not just clever, but wise to take the long view, to remain calm, to keep your head while all others are losing theirs, to find the best path in a difficult situation, the path of wisdom. And this is also the path of wisdom that reflects the glory of God.

Chakam, Chakma is one of the words for divine truth. It is wisdom. And you impart wisdom to me, the Psalmist says, in my distress, through your commandments.

And the second half of this, you have it translated for they are ever with me, but this is a singular. And so the idea here is not just wisdom, not that my distress is always mine, the wisdom, the nearer reference here. So if you just read this in Hebrew and translated it into English, from my distress, you make me wiser through your commandments, forever it is mine.

Forever it, the wisdom, the wisdom that we gain in this world. Jesus said in this world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I've overcome the world, but the wisdom that we gain in this life, through trial, through distress, through those oh vey moments is ours forever.

God is granting us this wisdom, not just so that we can, you know, walk a more rosy path in this life. This wisdom is preparing us for eternity. It is wisdom that will be applicable and useful and necessary to serve God in eternity.

Forever, you make me wiser through your commandments, through my distress. And it says for, but it's really because. Ki, that's the cough, means because.

This is for in the sense of because. Unto the ages, la'olam, because. Eternally, it is to me.

This wisdom belongs to me. You're giving me this wisdom, and I'm going to have it, la'olam. What a wonderful thing.

Momentary light affliction yields for us an eternal weight of glory. Remember that? Paul says it in Romans. Our momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory.

This is the Old Testament equivalent of that same thing. It's a little deeper than it looked when we first read this, isn't it? Distress is a means of gaining wisdom that will be ours, la'olam. Unto the ages, into the kingdoms of the son and eventually the father.

You never lose that hard won wisdom. Well, I'm liking this personally because sometimes I think why this horrible distress, the circumstance is painful, and I don't see any upside. It was bad, it got worse, and it ended tragically, and I don't see where any good was done.

Many people have stumbled and lost their faith. When we did that study of Bart Ehrman a few years ago, and we saw that he was an evangelical scholar and had been in a fundamentalist church and was seemingly doing fine, and then he lost a child, and he said, well, any God that would take my child, I can't believe in him, and he just threw it all over and became an anti-Christian. And it's sad, and this is the principle that is easy to miss.

Because if you have hope only in this life, remember in Corinthians, if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. And a lot of people who say, I don't see the sense in this circumstance, I don't see the sense in this tragic outcome or this unbearable loss or this just diminution and devolvement and downward trend in circumstance, I don't see any reason why God would, could or should do this. And it can be a real inhibition if we don't understand that it's not circumstances.

God could miraculously fix any circumstance anytime. He could prevent any evil action. He could prevent any loss.

He could prevent anything that you can think of that is tragic or that would make somebody say, oy vey. God could easily with a thought prevent those things from ever happening. He lets them happen anyway.

And many times we don't see a vindication or a justification or a tangible reason in our life or in our circumstance. We just think, well, that was bad and there's no upside. Little children abused in crack houses and growing up in horrible situations.

And how could God just let them be victims? How could God let children starve in this land and in others? And how could God let, how could God dot, dot, dot? Well, in those moments, it is our challenge to look for wisdom, wisdom, step back and try to think the way God thinks. If God has the power to stop tragedy and he doesn't do it, could there be a purpose that is bigger than me, bigger than my immediate circumstance? Is there something I could, should, can learn? Can I gain wisdom that partakes of eternity, that is going to serve in eternity, that is going to reflect the glory of God? As I make it the object of my faith, if I am only going to believe so long as I can understand everything God is doing and God's plan has to make sense to me or I'm checking out, I'm getting off the bus. That train can go on without me.

God is required to explain his plan to me and his dealings in circumstances. And he doesn't reveal it to me. Well, I'm done.

Well, God may let us get off of that train or that bus, but it's a tragic loss to us because we are missing the opportunity to partake of wisdom through that situation. Any unbeliever can buy into a program or a plan or a procedure if he can see the short-term benefit to himself. There's

this element of the Christian life called faith that is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

And okay, maybe God's smarter than I am. Maybe God's got a higher perspective and can see the end from the beginning much better than I can. And although this looks awful to me and looks pointless to me, and I cannot imagine any circumstance or any situation where this is ever going to be worked together for good, God can.

I have used this illustration many times, but since I've been dog sitting this past week, there are so many things that I do that I cannot make the dogs understand. You have to wait. You have to, you need to do what I want you to do right now.

And the fact that you don't understand it is just an impediment to me getting my stuff done because you're not as smart as I am. I'm a human, you're a dog. You should do what I say and everything is going to be great.

You got to trust me. I can't explain what I'm doing at your dog level. By the time I could figure out some way to make you understand it, the opportunity would be passed.

Well, the distance between my intellect and that of, say, Sweet Pea, the Havanese dog, there's a finite distance. It may not be that great. If you know me and know him, you may say, well, you know, he's almost as smart as you are.

But you think about the distance between our grasp and our finite understanding and that of God, and it's really kind of a silly demand that God explain every single thing. Well, that's what the psalmist is talking about. My oives are a gateway into God's wisdom.

And I need to look at them like that. And I need to be looking for the wisdom that is going to be my eternal possession. I'll never lose it.

I'll never forget it. It will never have no point, the wisdom that I gained. And it comes because I have faith that there is a reason, that there is a God in heaven who's smarter than I am, who sees the end from the beginning.

So it's not just wiser than my enemies. It is from my distress. You make me wise through your commandments.

And this is what should I do? Fret not yourself because of evil men. Take no thought. You know, worry is a sin.

Excessive concentration on the details of life, subjectivity, eyes on circumstances, eyes on people, eyes on things, even eyes on ourself. If we are too introspective and start churning up a lot of mud in our own soul, it's not healthy. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, our deliverance, our hope, our sustaining grace is outside ourselves, not within.

And you can't sit there and go through this spiritual naval lint picking and get anywhere. God

has a purpose. It's his wisdom that we want to find.

Well, that's just the first couple of verses here in the main section. We'll do one more here and take our break because he's going to shift now when he says in verse 99, from all my teachers, I have more understanding. Now they translate this, I have more understanding than all my teachers.

And you could take it that way, but it's hard not to see a little bit of a prideful streak there or a separation. You know, here you've got teachers who are trying to impart something to you and say, well, I'm smarter than they are. And what is the application of that? If I have more understanding than my teachers, what am I going to do with my teachers? I'm going to stop listening.

I'll maybe try to instruct my teacher what this literally says in Hebrew and feel free to just take the standard translation. My suggestion, my understanding of this is that it is from, maim means from. From all my teachers, I have more understanding because, and you have that key again, that kaf, and they translate it for, but it's because.

I get more out of what teachers teach me because your testimonies are my meditation. When people teach me something, I get more out of it because I fit it into a spiritual context. I'm thinking about God's testimonies and I'm fitting in.

Have you ever been watching these wonderful nature filming things? They just go to extraordinary lengths and use drones and whatnot. And they fly right alongside a goose or an eagle or whatever. And you think, that is so fantastic.

And they're talking about their habits and they're young and how they learned to fly in one thing or another. It's one thing to just admire nature. Any unbeliever can admire nature.

But what happens when you think about the God of creation who in these little T9C pea-sized bird brains put all of this wonderful knowledge and this graceful beauty and survival skills and adaptability and all the rest of it. You take what you learn and fit it into the context of God's testimonies. And it just enhances them both.

You have a greater appreciation for God and his word. And you have a greater appreciation for the things that you learn when teachers present them. So verse 99, from all my teachers, I have more understanding.

Any unbeliever could sit there and listen to a teacher imparting knowledge, but I get more understanding because I have the context of your testimonies and they are my meditation. So I interweave, I bring together, I synthesize secular knowledge into my knowledge of God's testimonies and who it is that brought all this about. Isn't that a wonderful thought? Everything you learn, every new experience, every piece of knowledge, every additional thing that you find, you can fit it into the larger context of who we are, why we're here, what God's purpose is, what his plan, how gracious he is, the rain that falls on the just and the unjust, his tolerance.

He's not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance. And people that get impatient for the return of the Lord, Peter says, you should look at that as grace. God is trying to give everyone maximum opportunity.

Well, let's pause here in the middle of the main section and take our break. When we come back, we'll finish this section and then get into one of the best known sections of Psalm 119, there is. And when we were memorizing it, we had a little special way to remember it.

We'll see that when we come back.