

The Blessed Way of God's Children

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Bible Text: Psalm 119:1-9
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Our Scripture reading this afternoon is found in Psalm 119. We read the first 16 verses.

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.
2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. 3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. 4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. 5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! 6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. 7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. 8 I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly. 9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. 10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. 11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. 12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. 13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. 14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. 16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this afternoon is those first eight verses of Psalm 119. I'm not going to read all of those again, but simply by way of introduction, read the first verse,

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, would you say that that verse describes your life? Would I say that? Am I undefiled in the way? Do I walk in the law of the Lord? Do I seek him with my whole heart? David says that those who are truly blessed do those things so I ask myself: am I undefiled in my attitudes towards my fellow brothers and sisters? Do I walk in the law of the Lord when it comes to how I spend my time during the week? Do I have such a regard for God's testimonies that they rule every

aspect of my life? Do I desire God so much that I don't let other things steal my time that I might spend with him?

As we look forward to celebrating the Lord's Supper, God calls us, beloved, to examine ourselves. Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. If we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to our comfort we need to see in the first place, our sins and our sinfulness and the curse that we deserve for them, because if we are going to hunger and thirst after Christ and delight in that supper that he provides, that he provides to us himself, we need to see ourselves as those that need a physician, and if we see that sin in ourselves, we will come to the supper ashamed that we have sinned against our God.

Secondly, if we're going to celebrate the supper to our comfort, we need to see that we believe God's faithful promise that we are forgiven. We don't just come to the supper ashamed of our sins, but also rejoicing that God has provided a Savior, that he has provided Jesus Christ, that he forgives us for Christ's sake and he imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ as if we had kept that law perfectly ourselves. And knowing the glorious inheritance that is ours, the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ, we will come to the supper with joy. I am blessed to belong to my faithful Savior.

Then thirdly, if we're going to celebrate the supper to our comfort, we need to see that it is our purpose to show true thankfulness by walking uprightly before him. And that was David's desire. David calls out to God, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" Ultimately the only blessed way for us is the way of salvation in Jesus Christ, and even though David does not mention Jesus Christ, this is an Old Testament passage, yet he is talking in this Psalm only about God's people who have been adopted in Jesus Christ. This is not talking about the wicked reprobate. The Psalm is a Psalm about God's people.

Most of us are familiar with the fact that Psalm 119 is an acrostic, that each of the 22 sections begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet and it follows through the alphabet so all of the first eight verses begin with that first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph. By doing that, by making the Psalm follow through the alphabet, David makes it easier for the Jews at least, to memorize the Psalm, but more than that we can see the acrostic this way since we don't have it that way in the English, but we can see it this way: the Psalm is the A, B, C of the Christian life. Then it's striking that the very first word of this very first section of the entire Psalm, what word did David choose under the inspiration of the Spirit to make the first word of the Psalm? As in English, so in the Hebrew, the word "blessed." Ashrei starts with the Hebrew letter aleph. That's the first word that he mentions indicating that the Psalm is about those who are blessed. The Psalm speaks to us of the blessed way of God's children.

So we want to consider that section under that theme, the blessed way of God's children. Let's note in the first place the blessed inheritance that God has given to them; secondly, the blessed prayer that the Psalmist makes; and lastly, a blessed desire. The blessed way of God's children.

We ought to see, beloved, that our salvation is a gift. One of the truths that we hold dear as God's children is that we do not deserve salvation ourselves, salvation is a gift. It is given to undeserving sinners. That's implied by the word that David uses. When he says that we are blessed, blessed are the undefiled in the way, blessed are they that keep his testimonies, blessed refers to receiving a glorious inheritance that points to happiness and bliss as we have that inheritance.

What does that happiness consist of? Does our happiness consist of having a sports team that we can rejoice in? Does our happiness in life consist of having a big house that suits us perfectly? Does our happiness consist of being healthy? Does our happiness consist of having a good job or being in a family that has no strife? Then what does our true and lasting happiness consist? Well, what greater bliss is there, beloved, then to be on the path that leads to heaven? There is no greater joy than to be on the pathway that leads to heaven.

True blessedness is to belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. That's what true blessedness is. True blessedness is to have been purchased by him and to be set on that pathway that leads to glory. There is nothing else that can bring happiness as this reality brings happiness. If we have everything else in the world and we do not have this inheritance, if we do not have salvation in Jesus Christ, then we cannot be truly happy. But if we have this inheritance and we lack all the other things that the world desires, we still are blessed.

Happiness, true happiness, blessedness, is for those who have salvation. That Moses expresses in Deuteronomy 33:29. He says, "Happy art thou," that's the same word that David uses in our text. Blessed, we could translate it. "Blessed art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places." What is the happiness of Israel? That they are saved by the Lord.

Beloved, we are blessed in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. What a precious undeserved gift that God would take us into covenant fellowship with himself though we deserve to be cast out of his presence.

Salvation is a gift. That blessedness becomes all the more precious when you consider that by nature we are not blessed. As we were in Adam, we were all cursed. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden as his friends/servants. He put them in a truly blessed position and then he told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and every time they walked by that tree and said no to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were saying yes to God.

God put Adam and Eve in the garden to love him and to serve him and to walk in his ways, but at the instigation of the devil, they chose to walk in their own ways. They rejected God's ways and, therefore, they were cursed. By nature, the whole human race is cursed and now apart from God's grace, apart from his blessing us, all we would ever do

is walk in rebellion against God. Apart from his grace, all we would ever be are those with froward hearts. But a froward heart is an abomination to God. God cannot stand a froward heart. It's disgusting to him.

I know someone who by way of illustration, someone who likes peanuts. They enjoy peanuts. They once took a handful of peanuts out of the cupboard and threw in their mouths until they discovered that it wasn't just peanuts in their mouths, they also got a cockroach, and they spit the whole thing out. It was disgusting to them to think about putting this cockroach, this insect known for scavenging and filth, and mixing it together with food. That's disgusting, but now multiply that. The righteous and holy God who loves righteousness, he cannot stand iniquity. He cannot stand rebellion. It's abominable to him. It's disgusting. He cannot stand it. He cannot have fellowship with wicked rebels unless our sin is put away.

We deserve to be cursed by God but God still blesses us. Blessed, that's how David begins the Psalm. God takes us into covenant fellowship with himself on the basis not of our own righteousness but of Christ's perfect righteousness, and then he sets us on a path that leads to glory and he holds our hands along the way. That's the blessedness that David is talking about. And as we examine ourselves, beloved, we ought to have a firm conviction that that blessedness is ours. God has taken undeserving sinners into fellowship with himself.

But now how is that blessedness evident in the lives of God's people? David expresses it in the first three verses of our text. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways." That's talking about fellowship with God who seek him with the whole heart. That blessedness is evident in the lives of God's people. Those who are blessed by God, those who have been taken into fellowship with God, who are set on that way that leads to glory, these are described in the first place as those who are undefiled in the way. Undefiled has the idea, the fundamental idea of completeness. Someone who is undefiled is someone who is in the right way and according to the parallel phrase, those who are undefiled, they walk in the law of the Lord. They conduct their lives in conformity to God's law. In their walk of life, they take heed to God's instruction. They regard their walk of thankfulness as an important aspect of their lives. They exert a holy care to walk according to God's law. That's an evidence of those who are blessed, beloved. Could that be said of you and me? Do we exert ourselves to walk in the law of the Lord out of thankfulness to him?

Secondly, those who are blessed by God are described as those who keep his testimonies, and the idea of testimonies, and the psalmist uses different terms for God's law, but the idea of testimonies is that God has given explicit witness. He has testified about certain things. He has given us explicit witness about his will and his righteousness and his love and his grace. He has given us explicit witness in the word concerning Jesus Christ, our only Savior. He has given us explicit witness concerning our calling, even to eat and drink to the glory of God as his people. Those who keep his testimonies, to keep those

testimonies means to have such a regard for them that we ponder them, yes, but we also seek to practice them.

Together with that, David says that those who are blessed by God seek him with the whole heart. To seek God is to carefully follow after him. That means looking to God for guidance. It means asking him to lead us into a greater knowledge of himself. Do we seek God with our whole heart? There is not one of us here, beloved, that could say, "I have sought God with my whole heart." Indeed we often become careless because we forget God's goodness and his mercy to us.

David teaches that blessedness belongs to those who seek him with the whole heart. We mustn't just seek God outwardly, going through certain motions. He doesn't say, "Blessed are those who seek him with their feet and their hands outwardly." But God wants us to seek him with the affections of the heart, not just going through the motions.

God is not pleased when we do not seek him with true affection of heart, and not only that, he's not pleased when we only give him part of ourselves. God is not pleased when we say to ourselves, "I'll serve God in this department, but I'm not going to serve him in that department. Yes, I'll go to church twice on Sunday but don't ask me to give up my pet sin. Yes, I'll give money to missions but don't ask me to mention my faith at work. And I'll love them who love me, I'll do that but don't ask me to love my enemies." God doesn't want just half of us. God doesn't want us to serve him only when it's convenient for us. "Yes, I'm willing to give that up but not the whole of men." God wants us to serve him with the whole heart, without hypocrisy, without one foot in the world and one foot in the church, without serving him only on Sunday and serving ourselves the rest of the week. He wants us to serve him with the whole heart.

You know, when we read these verses, beloved, we might get the impression that David has an unrealistic picture of the Christian life. In fact, we might even be tempted to call David a perfectionist. "How can he talk about the Christian life the way he does? Undefined in the way? Doesn't he know that we still have the old man of sin? Doesn't David know that our way is defiled by sins every day? Doesn't David know this?" But one solution to that problem that people have used is to conclude, "Well, David is not talking about the Christian at all, he's only talking about Jesus Christ. Christ is the only one who was undefiled in the way, completely undefiled in the way. Christ alone walked in the law of God. Christ alone did no iniquity." And that would be true, Christ alone fits that description perfectly, but that would be a mistake, beloved, because David is not talking about one particular individual, he's talking about God's people in the plural. "Blessed are they," David says, "they also do no iniquity."

So how are we to take this Psalm because we might look at these things and say, "Well, I must not be blessed then because I don't fit that description." I believe the correct way to look at these verses is to see these things as the mark to which all of us must aim. We press forward towards the mark and then to the degree that we are undefiled in the way, to that degree we will enjoy the blessedness that is ours. That's not saying, David is not saying, "Go be undefiled and then you will be blessed by God." David is not saying that.

David is not saying, "Be undefiled and then God will save you." No, as God's children, we already are blessed. We already have a glorious inheritance in heaven and that can never be taken away.

We are all graciously blessed by God. Blessedness is not something that we can earn but David still makes a connection between the degree of being undefiled and the degree in which we enjoy the blessedness that is ours. That's the idea of the Canons too, Canons, the Third and Fourth Head in Article 17 when it says, "For grace is conferred by means of admonitions and in this part, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more imminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is his work advanced, to whom alone all glory both of the means and of the saving fruit and efficacy is forever due." The Canons connects the performance of our duty with God's blessing working in us. Both of those things go hand-in-hand and so too when God desires to give us the enjoyment of our blessedness, he also works in us so that we walk in the way, and according to the Spirit's work in us, then we begin to walk in the law of the Lord.

According to his work, we begin to keep his testimonies, we begin to seek him with the whole heart. Certainly not perfectly. If David thought that, if he thought that only those who keep God's law perfectly were blessed, well, he would logically conclude that no one is blessed then. No one is blessed. But David realizes that by nature we are only defiled and out of the way. He realizes that he needs to be washed with the atoning blood of Christ, and that we need to be converted to God by the power of the Holy Spirit because otherwise we never would turn towards that undefiled way.

All who have been brought into fellowship with God by the blood and Spirit of Christ to a degree are undefiled in the way. They're not perfect in the way. You won't be perfect in the way until we reach glory. But to a degree. Because of the work of the Spirit of God, there is a degree to which we walk in the law of the Lord. There is a degree in which we keep his testimonies and seek him with the whole heart. There is a degree in which we walk in his ways. And to deny that is to deny the very work of God himself. All who have obtained the blessed inheritance from God through Jesus Christ will have the Holy Spirit working in our hearts.

Even though David understands that he enjoys a degree of blessedness, he also understands that he falls far short. David knows that he is not completely undefiled in the way. He knows that he doesn't walk in the law of the Lord perfectly. He knows that he doesn't keep God's commandments and seek him with the whole heart perfectly. He expresses God's commands in verse 4 and it's as if this commandment rings in his ears. Verse 4 he says, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently." And that's ringing in his ears. God's precepts are his particular instructions. They place weighty responsibilities upon us. Not only does God command us to carry out these responsibilities, he tells us to do so diligently. Indeed, it's impossible to be overly diligent.

David knows that God is a righteous and holy God and he wants to glorify God in the keeping of his precepts. He wants to draw near to God and enjoy blessedness but then he

looks at himself and he sees that he doesn't have the strength. He cannot in his own strength follow through. And that's what we ought to see about ourselves, beloved, as we examine ourselves this week. The devil and the world and my own sinful flesh conspire against me. Can I really hope to keep God's precepts diligently in my own strength? We need to see that we cannot.

And exactly in response to that awareness of his weakness and sinfulness, David says the next thing in the Psalm. After he sees God's commandment, he says, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" And now David is not talking to God's people, he's talking to God himself. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" He's praying to God.

A statute, David recognizes, that's something that has been inscribed or engraved. It refers to something that is permanent and refers to the authority of God's word. When God gave the Ten Commandments, he inscribed the commandments in table of stone. They were permanent. They were a permanent revelation of God's will for us. And David prays to God that he might keep those statutes. He prays for God's assistance. "Lord, that is my plea to thee. I cannot follow thee unless thou will give me the strength! Work in my by thy Spirit that I might keep thy statutes."

Jeremiah expresses the same thought in Jeremiah 10:23, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." So he prays, David prays to God. He wants a greater regard for God's written word. He wants all his ways and in his entire course of life to be rooted in God's word. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

Is that our prayer, beloved? O that our ways were directed to keep God's statutes. That's a prayer of someone who has already been blessed by God because those who are under the curse don't have that desire. They don't want to frame their lives according to God's word. They don't have the least desire to bring honor and glory to God. They don't have the least desire to approach unto God and to give him the glory that is due. That's not the prayer that the wicked utter. The words of the wicked would be something like this, "Blessed are they who do what's right in their own eyes. Blessed are those who seek to please themselves and look out for themselves." But not with the child of God. When the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and blesses us with covenant blessings, he gives us to see that without Christ we are nothing.

Such a prayer that David utters is born from a heart of one who is truly blessed. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" And such a prayer and such words as David speaks in this Psalm also express a blessed desire to enjoy fellowship with God because David knew that in the way of sin and in the way of rebellion there is not fellowship with God. David knew that great sins offend God and bring great guilt upon us. He knew that sins interrupt the exercise of our faith and wound our consciences so that at times we even lose the sense of God's favor until God brings us to repentance.

David did not want to walk in the way of rebellion. He wanted to delight himself in God. Psalm 119 is not a Psalm of someone who hates God's ways and wants to be far from God, but it's a Psalm of someone who has been blessed by God and who, therefore, loves God and wants to be near God. David knew that walking with God meant walking in his ways.

As it stood, David was ashamed of himself because he knew he fell short and that's why he asked God to direct him to keep his statutes. If God would be gracious to David, then he would not be ashamed anymore and that's the connection in verses 5 and 6. In verse 6 he says, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." If thou wilt work in me and direct my ways to keep thy statutes, if thou wilt do this work in me, then I shall not be ashamed in thy presence. And when we see, beloved, we all should see that we fall short of God's ways, we should repent and cry again to God for mercy and pray as David prays, "O that my ways were directed!"

But now we come to what should be our desire, to walk in God's ways. Now we ought to, there's nothing wrong with desiring to walk in God's ways because it will be the way of peace for ourselves, it will be a benefit for ourselves. Never does harm accrue to us because we have walked in God's ways, but especially David is concerned not just about himself, he's concerned about the glory of God. What is his main purpose? Why does he want to walk in God's ways? He says in verse 7, "I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments."

"Lord, when you teach me to walk in thy ways, then I will praise thee." That was David's desire and that's a mark of a thankful child of God, a sincere desire to walk in his ways to the praise of his name and that's David's resolution. He speaks at the end of this section, verse 8, "I will keep thy statutes. I will keep thy statutes. That is my resolution. That's my firm resolve." But to do that, he must have God going with him, giving him the grace every step of the way, and that's why he says what he does. "I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly." Don't leave me to myself. I can't do it by my own strength. Don't leave me to my own selfishness. Go with me and work in me that which is pleasing in thy sight.

Is that our desire, beloved, to show true thankfulness to God? Is that our resolution? The Supper of the Lord is for those who sorrow over sin, who don't want to walk in ways of wickedness. The Supper of the Lord is for those who find all of our salvation in Jesus Christ. And it is for those who want to live for the praise of our God by walking in his ways. Grant to us the grace, O Lord. Amen.

Let's pray.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee that thou hast blessed us. We thank thee that thou hast brought us into fellowship with thyself, that thou hast given to us a desire to walk in thy ways, to fellowship with thee, to experience joy in thy presence. Give us, we pray, thy grace. Do not forsake us utterly. Give to us all that we need that we may be faithful to thee. Forgive us where we fall short and lead us by thy grace. Bless us also

this week as we examine ourselves. Show to us, we pray, that thou hast worked in us a true faith. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.