

PSALM 119 verses 105-112

- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws.
- ¹⁰⁷ I have suffered much;
preserve my life, LORD, according to your word.
- ¹⁰⁸ Accept, LORD, the willing praise of my mouth,
and teach me your laws.
- ¹⁰⁹ Though I constantly take my life in my hands,
I will not forget your law.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have set a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end.

MATTHEW, Chapter 24, verses 10-13

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

MEDITATION

When I was a teenager at secondary school, I was a member of the Scripture Union. I remember wearing a little badge on the lapel of my school blazer. The background was coloured green and in the centre was a golden lamp, resembling the oil lamps with which people lit their homes in biblical times. It was associated with a verse from Psalm 119 which we read earlier. “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.” The psalmist testifies that God’s law has lit the way for him and shown him how to live.

Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms and in its entirety, it glorifies the law which God has given his people. Its writer has dedicated his life to obeying that law. He tells us in verse 109 that he kept the law, even when his life was in danger. He says in verse 110 that he kept it, even when his enemies threatened him. In verse 112 he insists that he will keep it to the very end. In other words, he is claiming perseverance.

Now perseverance is a quality which Jesus admired. In his prophecy recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus foretells that many people will lose faith and as lawlessness spreads, the love of many a person will grow cold; but the individual who endures to the end will be saved.

The Christian life is not a quick sprint, but a marathon. When we commit to it, we are in it for the long term. We have all known people who have embarked on the Christian way of life and joined the church. They have been very enthusiastic to begin with and thrown themselves into a lot of activity. However, as the years have gone on, they have dropped out, some gradually, others quite suddenly; but either way they are no longer on the scene. That must not be our way. We must not abandon our commitment with the going gets tough. We must keep right on to the end of the road. It is perseverance which will win the day.

If that is true for the whole of the Christian life, it is particularly true at the present time. We have now had lockdown for 15 weeks. Although some of the restrictions have been lifted, we need to persevere with the government guidelines. It's not easy; it's not pleasant; but it's the only way to get on top of the virus. Most of us were shocked ten or twelve days ago when people flocked to beaches on the south coast of England, ignoring all the rules about keeping two metres apart. We don't want a second spike of the virus in this country. We want to conquer it. And that requires perseverance, now more than ever. So, let's make sure we persevere.

PRAYER

Lord God, we praise you that you have given us your word as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. We give you praise that you communicated your word to the leaders of your people in ancient Israel, to their prophets and wise men. But we praise you especially that you have spoken most clearly through your living Word, through Jesus Christ your Son who dwelt among us.

We thank you, heavenly Father, that your message has been delivered to us in the twenty-first century through the Bible. We are grateful that in our time of trouble, it conveys a word of strength from you, that in our complacency it speaks your word of challenge to us, that amidst our doubts and uncertainties it holds out conviction, that in times of despondency and despair it brings to us your word of hope.

We confess, O God, that we have not always sought your message: we have left the Bible as a book to gather dust on a shelf. Even when we have read it, we have not always been alert for what you are saying to us in our current situation. There have also been times when we have ignored your commands and refused to obey them. Forgive us, we pray. Enable us to listen carefully for your message and to apply it to our daily lives. Help us to obey your commands, even when it is dangerous to do so. Help us to persevere in all circumstances.

O God, our Father, we pray for those whose work involves the Bible. Equip with the necessary skills those who translate the Bible into foreign languages so that people all over the world may receive the biblical message in their own tongue. We pray for scholars seeking to unravel the meaning of the Bible that they may pursue their task with diligence and sincerity. We pray for those who teach the Bible message, especially Sunday School teachers and leaders of youth organisations, that they may speak with clarity. We pray for all preachers of the Gospel, that they may communicate your word with enthusiasm and

relevance to our current situation. May the day soon come when people all over the world hear your word and respond to it. Enable each and every one to persevere in obedience and trust right to the very end and so be saved.

We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.