

The Final End of God's Enemies

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Date: 31 May 2020

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- [0 : 0 0] But we're going to join together now in reading God's Word. We've been, the last couple of weeks, looking at Psalm 119. Edward Lobb is going to be preaching that to us again shortly.
- And we're looking this morning at the section that begins at verse 113. So Psalm 119 at verse 113.
- The psalmist says, I hate the double-minded, but I love your law. You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in your word.
- Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God. Uphold me according to your promise that I may live.
- And let me not be put to shame in my hope. Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually. You spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain.
- [1 : 0 7] All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross. Therefore I love your testimonies. My flesh trembles for fear of you.
- I am afraid of your judgments. Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Good morning, friends.
- Well, as you know, our passage for this morning is Psalm 119, verses 113 to 120. And if you can have that turned up, that I think will be a help.
- Students at our Cornhill training course are asked to prepare something like a dozen 20-minute sermons during their two years of study with us.
- Now, they have other shorter Bible talks to prepare as well. But the 20-minute sermon delivered in class in front of their fellow students and the tutor is quite a challenging assignment.
- [2 : 1 2] Now, we ask the students to prepare sermons from Bible passages from all over the Bible. But very often the Psalms seem to pose the greatest problems for them.
- They ask, what kind of a thing is a psalm? How are you supposed to read it? Is it a song? Is it a poem? Is it a meditation? Is it a storehouse of doctrine?
- Is it a study of human psychology? Is it a piece of Israelite history? Well, a psalm is most of those things, sometimes all of those things. But let me suggest one very important element in every psalm.
- And that is that it shows us an example or model of how to live as a believer. The psalmists, the writers of the psalms, model the life of faith for us.
- The writer of this psalm, 119, is unpacking the inside of his heart and mind for us. He's showing us how he prays so that we should learn to pray in the same way.
- [3 : 1 4] He's showing us the part played in his life by the written word of God so that we too should love and trust and delight in our Bibles. He's showing us how he thinks about his opponents, how he wrestles with sorrows and afflictions.

He writes of his fears, his joys, his tears, his frustrations, his moments of delight, the sources of his peace and confidence, so as to give his readers an example of how to live as a believer.

God has given us this psalm in order to say to us, look at this man, look at this psalmist. You don't need to know his name. You don't need to know the dates of his birth or death or anything about his particular circumstances, whether he was married or had five children or lived beside the sea.

But look at his inner life. Look at his love for me and for my word. Look at what steadied him in times of trouble. Observe how he was able to persevere right through to the end of his life as a vital, believing man who relied on my words.

This is why this psalm is in the Bible, to give us an example to follow. After all, good examples can be very powerful. Many of you will have been into our Cornhill building next door, and you will have noticed that our main classroom is called the William Still Teaching Room.

[4 : 42] The library is called the James Philip Library, and the top floor is called the Dick Lucas Suite. And there are photographs of these three men on the walls nearby.

James Philip is holding a baby, one of his grandchildren. Dick Lucas and William Still are in their studies, working away with their Bibles. So why should those three men have been chosen to give character and flavor to the Cornhill building?

The answer is because of their example. They were all men who worked tirelessly for 50 years or more teaching and preaching the Bible. They're an inspiration to our students and to people like me to keep at it, to persevere in teaching the Bible.

Because it's the persevering teaching of the Bible that builds strong churches. Churches that can withstand the flaming missiles of the evil one. So let's turn to the example now of our psalmist.

And it's a pretty challenging example. Look at verse 113. I hate the double-minded. Do you want to follow that example? Try verse 117.

[5 : 52] Hold me up that I may be safe. Well, that's a bit more comforting. How about verse 120? My flesh trembles for fear of you.

Do we know that kind of fear? Do we want to know it? Now, our passage for this morning, as you know, is this section from verse 113.

And the key idea in this section is loyalty to God's word and the way that that loyalty will fashion our thinking and our outlook. Just look at the way that the psalmist expresses his loyalty to God's word in these verses.

Verse 113. I love your law. 114. I hope in your word. 115. I want to keep the commandments of my God.

116. Uphold me according to your promise. But where is that promise to be found? In God's words. 117. I want to have regard for your statutes continually.

[7 : 00] 118. I do not want to go astray from your statutes. 119. I love your testimonies. And verse 120.

I am afraid of your judgments because I take them so seriously. Our friend the psalmist is showing us an example of how he wishes to stick like a limpet to the words of God.

But it's not easy for him to be loyal to God's words. He finds himself under great pressure to be disloyal to God's words. And you and I will feel a similar pressure at times.

So let's turn to the text. And I want to take it in three sections. First, verses 113 to 115. Loyalty to God's words will lead us to avoid entanglement with God's enemies.

Now you'll see that God's enemies are described in verse 113 as the double-minded and in verse 115 as evildoers.

[8 : 03] But these are not two different groups of people. These are the same group. The word evildoers speaks for itself. These are people whose lives are directed on a course of opposition to God's will and word.

But the double-minded, that's a phrase that means something very similar. Hypocrites. People who present a plausible face to the world, but who in truth spurn what God loves and values.

You may remember back in verse 2 of this psalm, right back at the beginning, we have talk of the single-minded. Blessed are those who keep God's testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.

That's verse 2. The whole-hearted believer is blessed, but the double-minded person is to be shunned. And this double-mindedness is not honest questioning.

It's culpable hypocrisy. The honest questioner will sometimes be in a genuine moral quandary. He's presented with two alternative courses. So he says, should I do this or should I do that?

[9 : 08] It's not clear to me. There are pros and cons either way. But the double-minded hypocrite says, I know what's right, but I'm not going to do it. I hate it.

It doesn't work to my advantage. I shall sin with a high hand, and I don't care if people get hurt in the process. Let's just notice the amount of tension and stress in our psalmist's heart in verse 113.

These double-minded people are doing things close to him. He sees them at work. He hates what they're doing. He is deeply uncomfortable. He sees the law of God, the truth of God, which he loves, being flouted, treated with contempt, and he cannot bear it.

He cries out in verse 115. Depart from me, you evildoers, so that I may keep the commandments of my God. And why does he say that?

Because these people are pressing him to follow their example. Get away from me, you wretches. That's what he's saying. So that I may keep God's commandments. You are pressing me to accept your values, but I'm not going to do it.

[10 : 18] Let me give an example of this kind of pressure. In one of the churches that we belong to in England, there was a middle-aged man, I guess about in his late 40s, who had quite recently become a Christian.

And becoming a Christian had been very costly for him because he'd been a committed Freemason for many years, and he realized that Freemasonry was a false religion, and rightly he'd left the Freemasons.

Anyway, a few years later, he was working for a well-known national company where he was quite senior in the management structure. And a moment arrived when he was put under great pressure by those senior to him to tell a lie on behalf of the company.

You see, the company were drawing up a valuable contract with an important client. This contract was going to be worth a great deal of money to the company, and timing was of the essence.

But my friend realized that the company did not have sufficient personnel and resources to do the work within the required time. And his immediate senior in the company also knew that the company could not do it.

[11 : 25] So the senior man said to my friend, Jim, you've got to go to this client and reassure him that we can do it, and that we can do it on time. I know we can't do it, you know we can't do it, but we need this contract.

If we tell the client the truth, he'll cancel the contract, and he'll go to another company. You've got to go to him, and you must tell him that we certainly can do it. Now that's pressure, isn't it?

Well, Jim left the company. He found himself, so to speak, in bed with liars. But as a Christian, he was committed to truthfulness. He must have felt like our psalmist at verse 115.

Depart from me, you evildoers. I want to keep the commandments of my God. What he wanted above all was to keep God's command to tell the truth. So what lesson do we draw from our psalmist's example?

Is he teaching us to leave worldly company altogether? Should we as a congregation perhaps buy a Hebridean island and all go and live there and set up a new Tron village, build nice little bungalows, build a school for our children, support ourselves with our own farm, have a beef herd and chickens and so on?

[12 : 42] No, that cannot be the way forward. Think of Jesus. He didn't extract his disciples from the world and its pressures. On the contrary, he sent them into the world to bring the gospel to the world.

They were not of the world. They had a new identity and a new character, but they got stuck into the society of the world, and they lived a different kind of life.

A lifestyle that testified to the truth of the gospel. A lifestyle that authenticated their gospel preaching. But it wasn't easy for them. They had to live with great pressure.

This is why Paul the Apostle wrote to the Roman Christians, don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind so that you will be able to discern the will of God.

Our psalmist here, he hadn't fled to a Hebridean island. He was living amongst people who had no wish to love and obey the Lord, and that caused him pressure. It brought him pain.

[13 : 45] And this is what the Christian life is like at times. Again, a Christian police officer, to give another example, a police officer can sometimes be put under great pressure to tell a lie in court so as to secure a conviction.

It might cost that officer very dearly to insist on telling the truth. Or think of a Christian school teacher who's being pressed to accept, and if necessary, to teach, that transgenderism is a good thing for certain teenagers.

Now, the truth is that transgenderism is a great contemporary deceit. To collude with the idea that a boy is really a girl, or a girl is really a boy, is a deliberate rejection of what is self-evidently true.

Young people who are confused about their gender need to be handled with kindness and care, but in such a way as to help them to accept the truth about themselves, not to bury the truth and foster a lie.

These three examples that I've just given all concern truth and lies. Truth in business, truth in the law courts, truth in dealing with young people.

[14 : 55] The devil is the father of lies. All deceit ultimately originates in him. And the Lord's words combat and overcome the lies that our society embraces.

Just look back in our psalm to verse 104, 104. Through your precepts, your teaching, your laws, I get understanding, and that is why I hate every false way.

It's the understanding that we obtain from the Bible that enables us to hate falsehood and to unmask it for what it is. When you think about it, there's really an element of the lie in any kind of sin.

The desire to make money fraudulently is based on the lie that money is worth worshipping. The desire for extramarital sex is based on the lie that sex outside marriage is better sex than sex within marriage.

The desire to avoid responsibility and do no work and sponge off society is based on the lie that laziness brings happiness. Every sin is founded on some kind of deceit whereby the devil whispers to us, do this thing and you'll be happier.

[16 : 08] Commit this sin and it will be to your advantage. Some sins may bring a brief period of superficial pleasure, but all sin in the end will turn back on us like a savage dog and bite us, bringing guilt and remorse and shame, an increasingly hardened conscience, and a decreasing ability to distinguish right from wrong.

Look again at our verse 115. It's the one verse in this stanza of eight verses, which is not a prayer. Every other verse is addressed directly to God, but at verse 115, the psalmist leaves his praying and in his frustration, he rounds on his adversaries.

Depart from me, you evil doers, he says. And why does he cry out like that? Because they are a danger to him. Their presence will press him to imitate their ways.

So the lesson for us is to be very careful about who we get close to. We're in this world, in the world, rightly, of course. We can't be the Lord's representatives and ambassadors by fleeing to an island ghetto.

We're in the schools. We're in the NHS, in business and banking and the civil service and the universities. Inevitably, we're working alongside men and women of the world.

[17 : 32] And every day, the values of the world threaten to seep into our own hearts, like fog seeping in under a barn door. But we must resist those influences.

The evangelist D.L. Moody used to say, the ship is in the sea, but woe beside the ship if the sea gets into the ship. So let's be very careful about the partnerships that we enter into.

It's obviously courting disaster for a Christian to marry somebody who's not a Christian, but it can be equally disastrous to enter into a working partnership with people whose values and practices are hostile to the ethics of the Bible.

I realize, of course, that most Christian people have to work closely with people who are not Christians. If you're a civil servant or a teacher, a doctor, a nurse, a vet, a banker, a police officer, a professional musician, a solicitor, an administrator, an office worker, almost anything else you care to name, you're going to have to work closely with people who are not Christians.

But be very careful. The sea will always threaten to get into the ship. Of course, we're going to make friendships with people who are not Christians because we want to bring the gospel to them.

[18 : 49] If you're reading the word one-to-one with somebody, that somebody by definition is not a Christian. And you want not only to read with them, but to love them and to give them emotional support.

But as you share the gospel with them, you will also be commending the lifestyle and ethics of the Bible to them. So if your new friend says to you, shall I rob a bank?

You say, no. And in saying no to him, you'll be teaching him an essential element in the new lifestyle that you're inviting him to take on. So let's make friendships with those we're praying are going to become Christians.

But let's be very careful of making close alliances with those who have no love for the Lord or for the Bible. The double-minded and the evildoers are a danger to us.

But let's notice something very helpful to our psalmist, which is sandwiched between the double-minded and the evildoers. And that is verse 114.

[19 : 50] You, he says to God, you are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in your word. Pressed by the double-minded, harassed by the evildoers, he turns to a place of relief and safety.

And that place is the Lord himself. We need a hiding place to run to when we're threatened by our enemies. We need a shield to protect us when they're firing their missiles at us.

And that hiding place and shield is the Lord himself. And look at the second half of that verse. Our hope is not in the world, but in the word, in God's word.

We rest all our hopes on what the Bible teaches. We trust the Bible. We trust that it truly teaches us how to conduct ourselves in the old creation, in our life now.

But equally, we trust its teaching about our eternal home, our joyful, everlasting home in the new creation, when we shall see the Lord face to face. And our psalmist, by sandwiching verse 114, between the pressures of the double-minded and the harassing of the evildoers, is teaching us that the great secret of surviving in the world intact is to flee regularly to our hiding place and shield, to pray to him, to pour over his words, which supply us with a truth which the world will never give us, to be men and women who walk with God, who trust him, who are willing to stake everything on the truth of what he promises us.

[21 : 21] So are you feeling stressed by the corrupting influences of the people that you can't get away from, pressed to lower your standards, to cut corners, to give way to a thousand temptations?

Well, there is a hiding place. Turn to him every day, every hour if necessary. There is a shield. You, Lord, are my hiding place and my shield.

loyalty to God's word will lead us to avoid entanglement with God's enemies. Now, secondly, loyalty to God's word will lead us to cry to God to be held up from sinking.

This is the subject of the next two verses, 116 and 117. Uphold me according to your promise that I may live and let me not be put to shame in my hope.

Hold me up that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually. Now, in this section, as much as in the first, the psalmist is aware of being in danger.

[22 : 30] But there's a big difference between the two sections. In verses 113 to 15, the danger is from without. It's the danger of evildoers pressing the psalmist to turn away from God's commandments.

But in this new section, the danger is from within, from within the psalmist's own heart. In verse 116, the danger is that the psalmist may fall away from faith and finally be put to shame.

Let me not be put to shame, he cries. Uphold me that I may live. And in verse 117, his plea is that he may be kept safe so that he can keep on regarding, which means looking intently at God's statutes.

What he fears is that as his life goes on, he may turn away from God's teaching and his joy in God and in God's words may shrivel up and disappear.

Now, let me ask, are you aware of that danger? I hope so. It's the danger which the author of the epistle to the Hebrews keeps warning us against that we might fail to persevere to the very end.

[23 : 42] Look at verse 117. Have regard for your statutes continually. That means right through to the end. We're foolish to think that we're in no danger of drifting away.

I sometimes think of myself as a very old man in a care home sitting up in one of those high back chairs. There I am.

And an old friend, a Christian friend whom I haven't seen for many years comes to visit me. He finds me flicking through the pages of one of those silly glossy magazines that care homes seem to attract.

He says to me, Edward, have you not got your Bible close by? Oh no, I say, no, no. I haven't read the Bible for a long time now. I lost interest in it. I'm very happy here in this home.

There's a good television set. As long as I can see the sport, I'm perfectly happy. In that case, says my friend, in that case, Edward, if I may say so, you are a foolish old man.

[24 : 41] Look at the request the psalmist makes in these two verses. Uphold me that I may live. And then, hold me up that I may be safe. He feels like a man swimming in deep water who has almost exhausted his strength.

Or perhaps like a refugee fleeing his homeland, walking along some terrible, endless road who is then sinking down to the ground without strength to take another step.

It's a frank acknowledgement of our own weakness. It is possible to walk the road of faith for many a long mile and yet still to desert it before the end.

In John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, there's a very striking passage. As you may know, the book is cast in the form of a dream or vision. And John Bunyan is the dreamer. And in his dream, he's following the progress of two believing men, Christian and hopeful.

And Christian and hopeful have just died and they've been admitted with great joy into the celestial city, into heaven, to live with their master and king. But a third man, whose name is Ignorance, has been traveling with them.

[25 : 54] A man who has never truly repented, never really believed the gospel and forsaken the world. And when he presents himself at the gate of heaven, he is not admitted.

And John Bunyan writes this, the angels took this man up and carried him to a door in the side of the hill and put him in there. And then I saw that there was a way to hell even from the very gates of heaven as well as from the city of destruction.

In that connection, I once knew a man who had been outwardly a very keen church member for many, many years. Very active. Youth leader, evangelistic work and so on.

And then at the age of about 70, he had a granddaughter born to his son and his daughter-in-law. And this baby had some profound congenital heart problem and died at less than a week old.

The grandfather never darkened the church door again. We never saw him in church again. He took offense at God. He had never grasped that the Bible teaches that sorrows and tragedies will come to Christians as much as to anybody else.

[27 : 06] I remember a number of years later, I visited him in hospital when he was sick and dying. But he turned away from the Lord. He didn't want to know. The light had gone out of his eyes.

Let's be aware of that kind of danger. We do need to pray the prayers of these two verses here. Hold me up. There are times when we feel that we can hardly hold ourselves up.

Why hold up? Why be held up? That I may be safe. Safe from my own frailties. And, verse 117, that I may keep looking intently at your statutes continually.

So here's an alternative scenario in the care home where I am as a very old man. Edward says, my visitor, I've come to see you. It's your 99th birthday. I've come to ask you how you are.

Well, thank you so much. I'm falling to pieces physically, but I'm very well inside. Then my friend says, you need a new Bible. That one on your knee is falling to pieces. Yes, I say.

[28 : 08] Yes, a new one would be lovely. But make sure it's in large print, please. I need to be able to read it when I'm explaining the gospel to these nurses. That's a better picture, isn't it?

Hold me up that I may keep looking intently at your statutes. The Bible is the conduit of all God's blessings to us. Man shall not live by bread alone, cannot live that way, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Loyalty to God's word will lead us to cry out to God to be held up from sinking. Now, third, loyalty to God's word will lead us to tremble with horror at God's judgment of his enemies.

And this is the subject of verses 118, 19, 20. Again, let's notice the example of our psalmist in verse 120. My flesh trembles for fear of you and I'm afraid of your judgments.

Now, this is a very strong verse. The psalmist is not speaking here of the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, the fear of the Lord, which is the basis of the book of Proverbs, that awed, reverent fear that we feel when we read the moral instruction of the Bible.

[29 : 31] Now, this is different. This is a sense of real horror, the horror that makes the very flesh of the psalmist tremble, a horror that makes him say, I'm afraid of your judgments.

Do you remember the words of Jesus in Luke chapter 12? I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear.

Fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. It's that fear that is making the flesh of our psalmist tremble.

And what he says in verse 120 arises directly out of what he has just said in the two previous verses. Verses 118 and 119 are about God rejecting those who refuse to submit to his authority.

Just notice the verbs in those two verses. You spurn all who go astray from your statutes. You discard like dross all the wicked of the earth.

[30 : 41] Back in verses 113 to 115, the psalmist has been describing the danger that he is in. The danger that God's enemies will lead him astray and corrupt his desire to keep God's commands.

But these three final verses are about the danger, the very great danger, that God's enemies are in. The danger of being spurned by their creator, discarded by the great God who gave them life.

Just look at the powerful warning contained in these two verses. Verse 118 first. Who are spurned by the Lord God? those who go astray from God's teaching, who in some way exercise cunning as they try to twist God's teaching.

Now, as we know, the devil is characterized by the subtlety of his cunning in the Garden of Eden. And he shows his cunning by taking the truth and twisting it out of shape. Did God really say these things?

He says to Eve. Well, that's his normal way of attack, to cast doubt on whether God really meant what he said. And in our verse 118, you get the feeling that the people spurned by God are people who know his teaching.

[31 : 57] It's hard to go astray from God's statutes without previously being acquainted with them. And it has been painfully true throughout history that people acquainted with the Bible use cunning in order to try to make the Bible mean what it clearly cannot mean.

Today, for example, there are plenty of people, including church ministers, who will flatly deny that Jesus' death on the cross was a substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus dying in the place of the sinner.

Jesus bearing the wrath of God instead of the sinner. Jesus taking the chastisement that we deserved. Again, there are very many church ministers who say that the Bible's ethical teaching on sex and sexuality has no abiding force.

That perhaps it was appropriate in its own day, but it's clearly obsolete in the modern world. And they deploy cunning arguments so as to prove their point. God, of course, is not deceived by them.

Our psalmist trembles as he thinks of God spurning those who forsake the Bible's teaching by cunning arguments. And then look at verse 119.

[33 : 08] The wicked of the earth are discarded by God like dross. Now, their own friends and supporters don't think of them as dross at all. These people may be men and women who are applauded by the world as if they were made of sterling silver.

But God treats them like the dross that is burned away as silver is tested and purified. Their value in God's sight is nothing. Nothing.

Doesn't it make you weep to think about that? The people of this world who appear to be so substantial. Often, they're leaders in society. Their names are in the papers on the airwaves.

They're noticed and praised and made much of. They think of themselves as the movers and shakers of the world. But in the end, they carry no weight. They're without value in God's estimation, fit only to be cast away like dross.

Our psalmist at the end of verse 119 says, Therefore, because, O Lord, you judge the wicked who reject you, therefore I love your testimonies.

[34 : 17] I acknowledge the rightness and the perfection of your justice. I rejoice that you are the just judge because I know that ultimately the government of this world is perfectly executed.

Your judgments are right and true. Your rejection of the wicked is true and good. But, verse 120, when I consider what this really means, when I think of what the eternal condemnation of your opponents really involves, I tremble with horror.

I fear. And what do I fear? Look at the verse. I fear you. My flesh trembles for fear of you.

It's your judgments that make me afraid. Now, many of you who are listening today are evangelical, Bible-believing Christians. I want you to imagine a questionnaire being presented to you.

You're asked to fill in the questionnaire which details the things that you believe. So you work your way down through the questionnaire, ticking box after box. Then you're asked, do you believe in God's judgment?

[35 : 27] You tick the box. Do you believe in hell? You tick the box. You're an evangelical. You've been taught to believe in judgment and hell. But just imagine this question on the questionnaire.

Does your flesh ever tremble for fear of God when you consider his judgments? Do you tick that box? Those of us who are Christians, we need not fear hell for ourselves.

The Lord Jesus has taken the chastisement that we deserved. By his wounds we are healed. God has shown us a quite extraordinary mercy. The Lord Jesus has stood between us and the anger of God.

The gospel speaks of a deliverance greater than we shall ever understand until that day when we see our Lord Jesus with the marks of the nails still visible on his body in heaven.

We shall understand it then. But we need to learn what our psalmist is speaking of in verse 120. We need, as it were, to look into the abyss and to see what we've been rescued from and then we shall be really thankful for the gospel.

[36 : 37] We rejoice in the righteousness, the altogether righteous judgment of God because it demonstrates his perfect justice. It reminds us that the government of the universe is in perfect hands.

But we must learn the meaning of verse 120. My flesh trembles for fear of you and I'm afraid of your judgments. That's what Jesus meant when he said, I will tell you whom to fear.

Fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Let us pray together.

And as we pray, let's thank God for his wonderful mercy and kindness to us. And when I think that God, his son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in that on the cross my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul, my savior God, to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art. Amen.