

Psalm 119:81-96
Psalm 119K-L
1 Peter 1

“Longing for Forever”

March 30, 2025

“My soul longs for your salvation.”
“My eyes long for your promise.
I ask, When will you comfort me?”
“How long must your servant endure?”

Yesterday we attended the funeral of Pastor Earl Hairston,
who served for 19 years as the pastor of Greater Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church.

Pastor Davidson preached an eight minute sermon on Job 15.
He managed to pack a tremendous amount of exegesis – hermeneutics – and theology
into eight minutes.
And – as is generally true of Black Baptist sermons –
it packed a wallop rhetorically!

Because Job was longing for deliverance!
Job longed for God’s promises – God’s comfort!
It’s the same word that Job will use many times longing for comfort –
and then at the end, when he sees God, Job will say,
“I despise myself and am comforted in dust and ashes.” (42:6)

But Job’s hope was that he would pass through death to resurrection.

And what Job hoped for – Jesus has done!
Job endures a metaphorical death – and he is raised up in a metaphorical resurrection!
But what Job symbolizes and depicts, Jesus embodies and enacts!

I couldn’t help but give thanks to God,
because this is the same message that Psalm 119 brings in stanzas Kaph and Lamed –
verses 81-96.

Stanza Kaph reaches the bottom of the Psalmist’s reflections on my misery.
In this sense, verses 81-88 gives us the stanza of the cross:
“They have almost made an end of me on earth” (v87) –
and so we sing this together with Jesus,
as the one who endured even death – even the cursed death of the cross –
for us!

Sing Psalm 119K
Read 1 Peter 1

What endures forever?
In a day where everything is designed to be disposable –

that may sound like a pointless question.
Nothing lasts forever!
“Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.” (v89)

I’ve titled today’s sermon “longing for forever”
because that is what we should be doing!

Nowadays we are very “present” focused.
We are very shortsighted –
 only thinking about our immediate future:
 what we will eat, what we will wear,
 or at most what we will do in a few months or a few years.
We buy computers that will last for 2-3 years.
We have a “disposable” mentality –
 everything is designed to last for a few months or a few years.

In such a transient world, “longing for forever” may seem out of place – or out of touch!

But 1 Peter 1 helps us think about this.
Peter writes “to the elect exiles of the dispersion” –
 those who are citizens of the heavenly kingdom
 and yet are living as exiles here –
 as he calls our lifetime in verse 17,
 “the time of your exile.”

Peter also sees our hope as an eschatological hope.
I haven’t used the word “eschatological” in a while.
Do you know what “eschatological” means?

Usually people speak of “eschatology”
 when they are debating the rapture or the millennium,
 but eschatology is far more important than that!

Eschatology has to do with the end – the goal – of history.

So if I asked you, “What is your eschatology?”
What would you say?

What is the goal of your story?
What is the purpose of your life?
Where are you going?
What are you heading toward?
What are you aiming at?

That is your eschatology.
For many people, their eschatology is “how to enjoy life well before I die.”

That is the point of their life.
They seek to be a good person – after all, they’ve figured out that when you help others,
you tend to be happier yourself – so they try to be a good person!
And then it’s all over.

It’s actually a pretty depressing eschatology:
Life is short and then you die – so do whatever you can to make it a little better,
a little happier along the way!

But what if there is something more to life?
What if there really is a God?!
And what if he made us for something more!
What if he made us for himself?!

Peter says you have been “born again to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading,
kept in heaven for you,
who by God’s power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1:3-5)

Peter says that *your* story has been united to the story of Jesus.
You have been born again –
you have a new identity, a new inheritance.

And therefore, Peter says,
“as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,
but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
since it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1:14-16)
You are no longer children of the devil.
You are now children of God.

And so we are called to live as a new family:
“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love,
love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable,
through the living and abiding word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23)

This is what Psalm 119 is pointing toward.
Our passage today, verses 81-96,
moves from longing for God’s salvation
to rejoicing in God’s faithfulness.
It moves from the very brink of despair
to the calm and resolute confidence
of one who knows that the Word of God endures forever.

Psalm 119 teaches us how to live as exiles – as sojourners –

as we walk by faith, not by sight.

A car may last for a couple hundred thousand miles –
a house may stand for a few hundred years –
but Psalm 119 reminds us that there is something that will endure forever!

1. **Aleph: Blessed Are Those Whose Way Is Blameless (1-8)**
2. **Beth: How Can a Young Man Keep His Way Pure? (9-16)**
3. **Gimel: Who Am I? A Servant and a Sojourner (17-24)**
4. **Daleth: To What Do I Cling? The Way of God – “according to your word” (25-32)**
5. **He: Teach Me, Give Me, Lead Me, Incline My Heart and Turn My Eyes (33-40)**
6. **Waw: Then I Will Keep, Walk, Speak, Find Delight, and Lift Up My Hands (41-48)**
7. **Zayin: Remember Me, Lord, as I Remember Your Word (49-56)**
8. **Heth: I Am Keeping My Promise, Lord, Please Keep Your Promise (57-64)**
9. **Teth: It is Good that I was Afflicted, because before I was Afflicted I went astray (65-72)**
10. **Yodh: In Faithfulness You Have Afflicted Me (73-80)**

Stanzas 11 and 12 are at the very heart of the Psalm.

There are ten stanzas before it,
and ten stanzas after it.

And in stanzas 11 and 12 we reach the turning point of the Psalm.

11. Kaph: I Am at the End of My Rope, O LORD, How Long? (81-88)

Stanza 11 (Kaph) is all about the “end.”

The key word in this stanza is the word “kalah” –
the verb in verses 81, 82, and 87 –
it has a root meaning “to end” or “to fail.”

It is often translated “longing” because the point of longing
is that you are facing an “end” that is not very promising,
and so you *long* for a different end.

We need to deal with the first four verses together:

*My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word.
My eyes long for your promise; I ask, ‘When will you comfort me?’
For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me? (81-84)*

This is the most desperate and depressing stanza in the whole Psalm.

The Psalmist longs for the salvation of God.
He has come to the end of his rope.
Will God ever deliver me?

Three times in this stanza the Psalmist asks “when?”

When will you comfort me? (v82)
Til when (or how long) must your servant endure? (v84)
When will you judge those who persecute me? (v84)

Have you ever been there?
Are you there right now?
Wondering when this relentless assault will ever end?

When, O Lord?

Psalm 119 teaches you how to respond to the relentless assault
of the world, the flesh and the devil.
There is no defiant shaking the fist toward God.
There is no screaming at the heavens.

Instead there is a humble lament –
there is the cry of an anguished heart that longs for God's promise.
I have not forgotten your statutes -- even though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke.
A wineskin in the smoke.

What happens if a wineskin is left in the smoke?
If you have a wineskin – and someone leaves it by a smoking fire –
what will happen?
It will shrivel up and shrink, drying out so that it becomes useless.

I am used up.
My usefulness is over.
I am finished.

And in verses 85-88, the Psalmist describes how this feels!

*The insolent have dug pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law.
All your commandments are sure; they persecute me with falsehood; help me!
They have almost made an end of me on earth, but I have not forgotten your precepts.
In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth. (85-88)*

The Psalmist has fallen into a pit –
and in a stanza all about “ending” he says,
“they have almost made an end of me on earth.”

And yet, in all of his despair and anguish the Psalmist does not question God's law.
He knows God's commandments are sure.
He knows that God's law *has* the answer.

But he wonders if help will ever come.
Will help ever come *for me*?

In contrast to the insolent who “do not live according to your law,”
“I have not forgotten your precepts.”
But my faithfulness to your law doesn’t seem to be doing any good!

So tell me, God,
what is the point of loving *your* truth when *their* falsehood seems to be winning??!

Psalm 119:81-88 is very much the stanza of the cross.

The insolent had dug pitfalls for Jesus,
preparing their trap for him, persecuting him with falsehood.
And yet our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted himself to him who judges justly –
and he was heard because he indeed
was the one righteous man who did not forget his Father’s precepts.

12. Lamedh: Your Word Endures Forever, and so I Will Never Forget Your Life-giving Precepts (89-96)

But stanza 12 (lamedh) stands in stark contrast with stanza 11.

Stanza 11 is all about “ending” –
but the key words in stanza 12 are “forever” (in verses 89 and 93),
“endure” or “stand” in verses 90 and 91,
and the Hebrew phrase “from generation to generation”
(here translated “to all generations”).

What it is that endures?

What it is that lasts forever?

*Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.
Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.
By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants.
If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. (89-92)*

The Psalmist is weak and near to his end.
But your Word, O LORD, is forever fixed in the heavens.

In verse 87 the Psalmist had almost perished from the earth,
but here in verse 90 we hear that God has established the earth and it stands fast.

The opening quatrain (four lines) of the twelfth stanza (Stanza Lamedh) fit neatly together.
Notice how the first line speaks of the heavens (v89),

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

and the second line speaks of the earth (v90),

*Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.*

and the third line speaks of how “they” stand by God’s appointment (v91).

By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants.

The fourth line, verse 92, speaks of the result for the Psalmist.

If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

So why do you delight in God's law?

Because God is the creator of heaven and earth.

He created all things and all things stand fast by his Word.

And the very Word by which God created the world,
is the Word in which you are to delight!

And it is only by delighting in his word that you can live.

All other things perish.

All other things end.

You see, there is a reason why our culture is so preoccupied with that which is disposable –
that which is perishable:

it is because *all things* perish;

all things pass away;

everything except the living and enduring Word of God.

And God's Word lives and endures

precisely because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Word that is firmly fixed in the heavens does not refer to a book.

(After all, when Psalm 119 was written, most of the Bible hadn't been written yet!)

The divine character of the Word was clear

long before John penned his opening line, "in the beginning was the Word."

But when John said, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" –

John was saying something profound about God himself!

We often focus on how the Word was God – and we should! –

because it is absolutely essential to see that eternal Son of God

is himself God!!

But we should equally emphasize the other line –

"and the Word was with God" –

because that means that God has never been alone.

Love and communication has always been –

because love and communication has existed within the Godhead for all eternity!

God did not make the world because he was lonely.

The Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –

made the world because God wanted *us* to share in his life –

to share in the love and communication that the Father had

with the Son and the Holy Spirit before the world began.

This is why Psalm 119, verse 89, says,
“Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.”

We too quickly delight in the perishable – the transient.
We start thinking that transient things can give us delight.
We even call them “consumer goods” –
things that are consumed – and are no more.

But the fleeting pleasures of this age cannot endure.

All things end.
Everything except the living and enduring Word of God.
The one who was in the beginning with the Father –
the one by whom all things were made.

Psalm 119 calls us to lift up our eyes beyond the transient and passing things of creation
to behold the glory of the living and abiding Word of God.

This is the only answer to the near-despair of the never-lasting world of stanza 11.
It is only when you lift up your eyes and behold the unchanging Word of God
that you will be able to live in the midst of this ever-changing world.

Notice what happens by connecting the meditation on creation in verses 89-91
(your word is fixed in the heavens, you have established the earth)
with the emphatically personal statement of verse 92
(“if your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction”).

The Psalmist links his own survival not only to the *truth* of God’s word,
but to his own delighting in God’s law.

After all, God’s word is true whether you like it or not!

The difference between life and death
is the difference between loving and delighting in God’s word – OR NOT.

The second half of the stanza also begins with the word “forever” –
though you would never know it from the English translation!

*I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.
I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts. (93-94)*

Then again, in English it sounds odd to say:
“Forever I will not forget your precepts.”
The proper way to say “forever I will not” is “I will never”!

But “forever” is certainly the key theme in this stanza.

Even as God’s word is firmly fixed in the heavens –
and even as God’s faithfulness endures through all the earth –
so also “forever” I will not forget your precepts,
because your precepts have given me life.

The word here is “olam” – “forever” –

a word that is used only twice in the first 10 stanzas,
but seven times in the last 10 stanzas.

“Forever” (*olam*) will be an important theme in the rest of the Psalm.

I’m living in the middle of suffering and affliction,
and while I have hope,
my hope is in something that I cannot see.

There is a tension in Psalm 119 between the promised blessing
and the experience of suffering –
in spite of the fact that I have been faithful to God’s law!

Have you ever heard someone complain that “God owes them”?

After all I’ve endured, God owes me!

It is remarkable that Psalm 119 makes it through 176 verses of struggling with affliction,
protesting innocence,

and declaring how much he loves God’s law –
and yet he *never* says “you owe me, God!”

The reason for that is simple!

The Psalmist really does *love* God’s law!

And he knows that it would be incredibly arrogant
for the servant to say to his master – “you owe me”!

He loves God’s law, he delights in God’s law, he keeps God’s law –
and therefore he humbles himself before God
and he waits upon the Lord,
trusting that God *will* do what is right.

The previous stanza (verse 87) had pled with God for life.

Here the Psalmist rejoices that God has indeed done what he promised.

By your precepts you have given me life!

God gives us life by his precepts.

(And keep in mind, that in Psalm 119, the law – the Torah –
encompasses the *whole* Word of God!)

So, for instance, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!”
is one of God’s precepts!

Our Lord Jesus himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,
no one comes to the Father, except through me!” (John 14:6)

Truly God gives us life by his precepts –
by the Word that is forever firmly fixed in the heavens!

You are faithful – your faithfulness endures to all generations.

But this does not mean that my problems have gone away.

*The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies.
I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad. (95-96)*

This is an interesting way to conclude such a triumphant stanza.

My enemies have not gone away.
The wicked still lie in wait to destroy me –
but I consider your testimonies.

Please hear this!

My hope is not that my enemies will go away.
My hope is that God's Word will endure longer than my enemies!

As we continue through the rest of the Psalm we will continue to hear about enemies,
trouble, anguish, and oppressors.

How do you respond to this?

When you pray,
when you pour out your heart to God in the midst of trouble,
what do you pray for?

Do you pray that God will change your circumstances?

O God, please change my husband!
O God, please change my parents!
O God, please change my coworkers!

Or do you pray that God will change you?

Is your heart focused on the transient –
on things that are coming to an end?

Or is your heart drawn to the living and abiding Word of God,
our Lord Jesus Christ himself?

I keep talking about delighting in God's Word.

Certainly this includes scripture – the written Word of God!
But we can never forget that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!

Psalm 119 is where we hear the Word *himself* (our Lord Jesus Christ)
singing about the Word *itself* (scripture).

And Jesus draws us into his song.

Because he has delighted in God's law,
truly God has delivered him from all his affliction.
And therefore those who hope in Jesus and delight in him –
the Word of God in the flesh –
will be delivered from all their sins and sorrow.

And so, as Peter says,
“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love,
love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable,
through the living and abiding word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23)