

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 1, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 16, 246:1, 296, 285, 283.

Lessons: Psalm 145, 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5, Matthew 20:1-16.

Sermon Text: Psalm 119:89-94

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow redeemed in Christ:

“Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” is an old saying. We never appreciate something quite as much as when we have to do without it. Martin Luther learned this concerning the Word of God. As a boy he did not have a Bible. When he was 17 years old and entered the University of Erfurt, he saw the Bible for the first time in the library. Later on in the monastery, some of the monks gave him a Bible bound in red leather. Then we are told: “He made himself so familiar with it that he knew what was on every page, and when some passage was mentioned he knew at once just where it was to be found.” He said: “I read the Bible diligently. Sometimes one important statement occupied all my thoughts for a whole day.” (Luther's Works, Vol. 54, p.14) On another occasion Luther said about the true Word of God: “I stake my soul on it and am ready to die for it.” p. 193

Today Bibles are available everywhere. But how little God's Word is appreciated! If we were to take a poll of the average church member, we could ask two questions: 1. How many Bibles do you have in your house? 2. How often do you read the Bible? Would we be embarrassed to answer this last question?

Our text for today is taken from the 119th Psalm, which in almost every one of its 176 verses speaks of the Word of God. It is our hope that after studying our text and learning its truths, we may be led to make better use of our Bibles. Let us meditate on:

THE GLORY AND IMPORTANCE OF GOD'S WORD.

1. **It is eternal; its teaching never change;**
2. **It shows God's faithfulness and how all things are subject to his will; and**
3. **It is something we should learn well and remember for our comfort and help in all afflictions.**

The psalmist who wrote the 119th Psalm said: *“Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.”* v. 111 In another verse he said: *“The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.”* v. 72 Why do you suppose he considered the Word of God so important and valuable? One answer is in the first verse of our text: *“Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.”* Note that he says to the Lord: It's Your Word. We're not talking about any old book written by men. We're talking about God's Word. If the Bible were just another book, we would not have such strong feelings about it. But because it is God's Word, we say with Luther: “I stake my soul on it and am ready to die for it.” These are the passages on which such conviction is based: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* II Tim. 3:16 Paul said to the Thessalonian believers: *“We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”* I Thess. 2:13 Hundreds of times when the prophets wrote, they told the people: *“Then the word of the LORD came to me. ...”* Ezek. 20:2 or, *“Hear what the LORD says to you,...”* Jer. 10:1 David the psalmist said: *“The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.”* II Sam. 23:2 Peter wrote: *“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy*

never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” II Pet. 1:20-21

The Bible is the Word of God, not just generally speaking, not just in some of its chapters and verses, but in every word and every thought. The words of the Bible, Paul says, are **“words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”** I Cor. 2:13 It's what we call verbal inspiration. That's its glory, and that's why it is so important!

Because the Bible is the Word of God, it is eternal, as our text says, and **“it stands firm in the heavens.”** God says of himself: **“I the LORD do not change.”** Mal. 3:6 So also his holy Word, the Bible, is eternal and unchangeable. The psalmist in this psalm says: **“All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.”** v. 160 Jesus said: **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”** Matt. 24:35 Peter writes: **“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.”** (quoted from Is. 40:6-8 in I Pet. 1:24-25)

This means that the teachings of the Bible never change from age to age. What Moses wrote in the first 5 books of the Bible about 3,500 years ago is the enduring truth of God's Word. What John wrote in the Book of Revelation about 2,000 years ago is the unchanging truth of God's Word. That's why John wrote: **“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”** Rev. 22:18-19 What God says about the creation of the universe in Genesis 1-2, the fall of man into sin in Genesis 3, the first promise of the Savior in Genesis 3:15, the flood of Noah's time in Genesis 6-9, is the Word of God, and it will never change. Therefore, we continue to teach today what our forefathers in the true Lutheran church taught many years ago.

The doctrines of those days are the doctrines of today. We pity the liberal theologians who change their teachings to agree with changing human opinions. It gives us a great deal of confidence in our church work to know that the teachings of God's Word do not change and never will. We do not have to worry about being old-fashioned in our teachings, only about being faithful to the Word.

One thing God's Word shows us is God's faithfulness and how all things are subject to his will.

2.

The psalmist says: **“Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.”** God's faithfulness is especially comforting for us. He is absolutely trustworthy in all his dealings with us. He did not create us and then leave us to take care of ourselves. As far as our bodily needs are concerned, the Bible teaches us to believe as the psalmist writes: **“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”** Ps. 145:15-16 If there are things that make us anxious and cause us to be filled with fears, we have this directive from the Lord: **“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”** I Pet. 5:7 The Sermon on the Mount teaches us that we have no reason to worry about what we need for our bodily needs, just like the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, for our heavenly Father knows that we need these things and will supply them abundantly. Jesus says: **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** Matt. 6:33 God is absolutely trustworthy. It is by the power of his Word that he sustains all things. The Bible says of Jesus: **“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”** Hebr. 1:3

The Lord's Word also shows his faithfulness in providing for our spiritual needs. Did he not send his only-begotten Son to save us from our sins? Did he not give his powerful Gospel Word to work faith in our hearts? Even when we were tiny infants the powerful Gospel in Holy Baptism created faith in our hearts. Now also he can by his powerful Gospel in word and sacrament strengthen and preserve us in the faith. We can count on him. The psalmist says: **“The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.”** Ps 145:18-19.

We need not fear in evil days, when our lives are filled with many difficulties and the world in which we live is so wicked. For the Lord can bring good out of evil. All things are subject to his will. All things will serve his ends, what he desires to bring about for the good of his believers in Christ. Paul says: **“We know that in all**

things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Rom. 8:28

The psalmist in our text teaches us to believe that the Word of God is important, and therefore it is something we should learn well and remember for our comfort and help in all afflictions.

3.

The psalmist from his own experience says: ***“If your law (that is, God’s word) had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have renewed my life. Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts.”*** The psalmist is saying that God's Word alone gave him the strength to endure in afflictions. He promises not to forget God's Word. He says he has sought out the directives of God's Word to guide him in his life.

When we are in trouble, when we are sick, when we have many things that trouble us, many afflictions, what is it that will really give us comfort? Is it that we have plenty of money to pay for the care we need? Is it the help of friends? Is it someone wishing us luck? Money and friends are fine, but they cannot give us the help we really need. What really gives us comfort and spiritual strength to go through all our afflictions is the Word of God. Therefore we should learn it well and remember it. The Bible says: ***“The Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.”*** Is. 49:13 Isaiah writes: ***“This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.’”*** Is. 49:17 The Lord promises: ***“Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”*** Is. 46:4 The Lord says: ***“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*** Is. 41:10

This is the confidence we have in the Lord, for above all else in importance, he has done this for us - he has given his one and only Son to be our Savior. The Savior laid down his life for us, shed his blood for us, kept the Law for us, and for his sake God has forgiven us all our sins. For Jesus' sake our sins are not counted against us and we are accounted as perfectly righteous in God's sight. Jesus will raise us up at the Last Day, and before his throne of judgment we will hear his invitation to enjoy the blessings of eternal life in heaven.

If all this does not move us to love the Word of God and value it as most important in our lives, then nothing will. May God the Holy Spirit give us a love for the Word of God so that we hear and learn it gladly and remain faithful to it to our end. Amen.

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