

Delighting in God's Word

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this evening, if you have Bibles on phone or tablet or perhaps they're on the screen, we're going to open up the Old Testament at Psalm 119. And I want to think about the verse, from verse 17 to verse 24, that section which is the third section of the Psalm. And I want to look at it with you in the hope that I would encourage you this evening, that I would encourage you to be people of the Word, that we would put the Word first, ready to face the week to come. This is the first day of a new week, and God has given us the opportunity again to gather together. So, may it please Him that as we study, we would develop within ourselves what is described for us here in this section of the Psalm, that we would be servant pilgrims. Do good, verse 17, to your servant, and I will live. I will obey your Word. Open my eyes and I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on the earth. Well, this Psalm throughout its entirety is given over to giving praise and thanks to God for His Word. And each section gives a slightly different emphasis to the life of God's people and the centrality of God's Word to His people. And that is something we must never lose sight of or lose our focus of. And that's why I think throughout the

Psalm, you'll find a repeated phrase. We have it here in verse 2, right at the beginning, blessed are they who keep His statutes and seek Him with all their heart. If you went through the Psalm, you'd find in verse 2, verse 10, verse 34, 58, and 69, that same phrase, talking there about all my heart. It's about wholeheartedness, commitment, a tenacity, a desire to hold on to the Lord by being people of His Word. Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep His statutes and seek Him with all their heart.

Verse 17 picks up on that theme. Do good to your servant, and I will live. I will obey your Word.

So that doesn't leave room, does it, to be gray, to be half-hearted, to be uncertain, to be less than fully committed. I will obey your Word. So right at the start of the Psalm and throughout, there is this wholeheartedness. There is a spirit of commitment, a tenacity, if you like, and that goes towards describing or defining the life of God's people. Blessed are they whose ways are blameless. There's something kinetic in the language here. There's nothing static or dull or formal or routine.

These things are good, and they have their place. Of course they do. However, when it comes to living for God, it's exactly that. It's about living for God. Too many people in our land tonight think of the Christian faith and the Christian church and the Christian gospel, if they think of it at all, as a Sunday thing, as a Sunday thing, as a pursuit or a hobby that takes up time at Easter or Christmas.

[3 : 36] It's the exact opposite of the spirit of this Psalm, where we are told we seek the Lord with all our heart, all our heart. Steadfast diligence and dependence on the Lord is key to our declaring the truth of the Lord. Can I just share with you what Calvin said in one comment about this Psalm? He said this, let us also seek a mind that is wise according to God's law. Let us also, like the Psalmist, seek a mind that is wise according to God's law. One other thing I would say to you about this Psalm in its entirety is that again and again and again throughout it, you'll find the Psalmist. We don't know who wrote the Psalm. There are various themes and suggestions and skills of thought here as to who wrote the Psalm, but what we do know is that the Psalmist was going through a tough time, a difficult time. Verse 25 just gives us an insight. I am laid low in the dust. Preserve my life according to your word. Verse 42, I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word. And as you go through the Psalm, you'll find that here again in verses 20, 21, and 22, he speaks about the arrogant people who are scornful and people who treat him with contempt. This was someone who knew real life.

He wasn't writing from some study locked away in a theological bubble, thinking, well, isn't this wonderful? I'll tell people about how things should be while not knowing what real life is all about.

You go through this Psalm, you'll find time and again, he's talking about being down in the dust, being downcast, feeling afraid for his very life. How does he respond? Tenaciously holding on to the word of God in order to come to the God of the word. And that's where verse 17 takes us. The attitude, if you like, the body language. How's he holding himself in front of God? Do good to your servant, and I will live. He also then, in verse 19, describes himself as a stranger or a pilgrim.

So what we have here is someone who knows his place in life as a servant pilgrim of his God, and he takes great delight that God has given him his word to sustain him, to rule him, to nurture him, to shape him, and to drive him. Your statutes, in verse 24, are my delight. They are my counselors.

They are my counselors. It was interesting to hear Anne say how, upon accord, they would love to feed you, students. They would love to feed you, and hopefully, when the guidelines allow, that that's going to happen, and you're going to be fed till it's coming out your ears. But one thing you'll find when you come here week by week is that you will be fed with the truth of the word, and that's what makes this place so special. And you'll have many opportunities, hopefully, for fellowship and meetings and getting to know and meet other people. But above all, you'll be coming here to be fed with the truth, and we find the truth in God's word. And I think that's what that passage, the well-known passage in Romans in chapter 5, is really all about, because something happens when we're fed with the truth.

[7 : 03] Let me just read to you a few verses from the start of Romans chapter 5. We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us. The truth, the truth of the word around which you will gather here, week by week, is what not only sets us free, but what enthralls us, which captivates us, which molds us, the word. Keep it at the center. A word of warning also. A word of warning is also—you can't turn to Psalm 119 and see verse after verse after verse and at least seven or eight different words used to try and describe the beauty and depth and splendor and wonder of the word. You'll have words like law, judgment, testimony, commandments, statutes, precepts. This is God's word, and just one English word doesn't quite do it. And so to emphasize for us all that the depth and splendor, the psalmist uses different words to draw the nuance and emphasis. Friends, there's one thing I want to point out as well, by way of warning. If the devil can get you away from the word, he succeeds. The devil is fanatically opposed to the word of God, the Son of God, God's day, and the message that comes from this book and the people who respond in faith. That's you and I. And if he can do anything to undermine our effectiveness, our ability to witness, our ability to be effective evangelists, to be strong in the

Lord and the power of his might, he will do it, and he will very often do so by undermining our understanding of the importance of God's word. I would implore you not to allow him in. Don't let the Bible become a dusty book. Wherever you are this evening, wherever you're going home tonight, whatever Monday has for you, Tuesday, Wednesday, don't let it be next Sunday before this book is open before you again. Because what the devil will do then is, you see, he's a miner. Of all the different descriptions we can certainly apply to him, he's a miner. He will dig in and dig in and dig in in an attempt to undermine the foundations of your witness and effectiveness, and he will do so by trying to torch the foundations that you're building upon this book. Don't let him do it.

Do good to your servant, and I will live. I will obey your word. Three things then to say very briefly this evening. Before closing, let me say first of all this. In this section from verses 17 to 24, the psalmist tells us to keep your focus. Keep your focus. I will obey your word. That's interesting there. In verse 17, it asks here in the NIV, I will obey your word. That word could be better rendered, I would suggest, as I will keep your word. And the word there, keep, that is the same word as you find here now, where is it? In verse 2. Blessed are they who keep his statutes. It's the same word. We've rendered it here as obey. But this one, obey, is by now, okay, this is one, two, this is the third section of the psalm, first verse. So, we've only had eight, 16 verses. This word, keep, has now already appeared six times. Six times. The word keep has already appeared in Psalm 119. I will keep your word. That's really interesting. It's the sixth time it appears, and it's a word that has about it the sense of digging in. It's a word that has about, its root meaning in the ancient Hebrew was to watch or preserve, to hedge about. I will hedge about. I will keep, I will preserve, I will watch your word.

The picture I have in mind here, if I could use an illustration with you of the Roman army, they were an efficient, ruthless, incredible, brilliant military machine. And they developed over a number of centuries of constant campaigning, a practice. When the Roman army went on campaign, wherever they stopped that night, wherever it was, wherever they were marching, they stopped and they built a marching camp. So, when they stopped, they set about first and foremost building a marching camp. Why? So that they would have a defensible position. And they did so especially when deep in enemy territory. So, when they marched out to conquer the tribes and the lands around their built-up areas, when the Roman soldiers went out and they were exposed to danger, the first thing they did when they stopped, they built a marching camp. That's the sense of this word. I will keep your word.

It's speaking about a protectiveness, a defensive wall. Remember what I've said already about the devil. What's he trying to do? He's trying to get in. He's wanting to work away and plant doubts and lies and deceit. He wants you to dishonor the Lord. He wants you to turn from the gospel. He wants you to ignore the Bible. So, what do we do? We commit to keeping the word. I will obey, keep. I will hedge about, guard. I will attend to your word. That Hebrew word, it's all there in the ancient. What an incredibly versatile word that is. Keep. A sense of digging in. But it's the same word. Let me just apply this in another way. If we turn forward in our Bibles to Psalm 121, Psalm 121 and verses 3. Listen to this.

[12 : 51] He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. That word there, watches, in the ancient Hebrew, is the same word. So, this is the thought.

As we keep the word of God, so we are kept by the God of the word. Friends, take that with you this evening. Take it to the fellowship. Take it home. Take it to work tomorrow. Take it into your heart and life. That as you keep the word of God, so you are kept by the God of the word. I promise that is.

And I hope to us here this evening, to anyone watching at home, that that would be a great encouragement this evening. Again, I don't know what you're facing, and we don't know what tomorrow will bring, and we don't know what next week will bring, but the Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand as you keep his word, so he keeps you. The word of God, then. It is our delight. It is wondrous. We long for the word. And why? Why do we keep the word? Why are we molded and shaped by it? Because it is God's word. I will obey. I will keep your word. And that's the focus, which is why in the very next breath, the psalmist would sing, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. Isn't that wonderful? The spirit of worship, anticipation. Isn't it good to perhaps sometimes in coming in the door and gathering and chatting, and it was so good just before coming in there with Angus as the door was open, just to hear the buzz of conversation around as the people gather? It's been so long, hasn't it, since we've been able to meet like this in our church buildings, and just to hear that buzz and that conversation, we're together. But I think there's something of that here in this verse 18. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. Anticipation, excitement. Do we have it? We should. Why? Because this is the word of God.

And so what the psalm is saying to us, first and foremost, in these verses is, keep your focus. Friends, keep your focus. Keep your heart on the word and look to your Savior. I seek you in verse 10, with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. Another kind of, perhaps it's another warning, but I was watching recently one of David Attenborough's documentaries, tremendous, the usual work that does that silky commentary, where he just leads us down the path and tells us all about things. And this particular documentary, he was focusing on a flock of flamingos at a flamingo colony that lives in the Andes at 4,000 meters height. It's a very harsh environment. And what was incredible about watching the story of the flamingos unfold is, you know how they stand on their one leg or their two legs if they get tired? At night, it gets so cold up there that the lake they stand in, it freezes. So in the morning, not a single flamingo can move. Huge, big colony of flamingos, frozen solid in the lake because the water they're standing in has frozen. And what they, they're stuck there until the sun comes up and begins to melt the ice. And Attenborough in his commentary was, was having a bit of fun at the flamingos expense because as the ice began to melt and they got free, they could take two or three steps and poof, their feet would go through the ice again. They'd be stumbling all over the place. And he said something like, walking on thin ice is always risky. I could just hear Attenborough coming out with that, couldn't you? Walking on thin ice is always risky. Friends, I just want to take that again as we move on very quickly to our few more thoughts. If we come away from the Word as Christians, we're walking on thin ice.

And that's risky. It's risky spiritually. It's risky for our growth, for our well-being. It's risky for our relationship with the Lord. So I would encourage you not to let this book be closed until next Sunday. Be people of the Word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. Keep your focus. Secondly, quickly, this one. Expect opposition. You rebuke the arrogant who are cursed and who stray from your commands. Now we've got a contrast. Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. What happens when the psalmist is a man of the Word, as he follows and lives? What happens to the people of God as we do all we can to be people of the book? Do we have a rosy, wonderful, carefree, stressless existence? No, that's not real life, is it? What happens here?

[18 : 03] You rebuke the arrogant who are cursed and to stray from your commands. There's the contrast right there. How many people in Aberdeen tonight don't know the first thing about Psalm 119, the Old New Testament, or the cross of Christ? Thousands, aren't there? Thousands. We don't need to go far away to find them. We'd bump into them a dozen times before we get home. There's a contrast here, and the contrast is those who have no interest in the Word. And the last thing they want to acknowledge is that they're a servant pilgrim of the God of the Word. They're going to live for themselves. It's the age-old conflict. The world, the flesh, and the devil, the cross of Christ. The devil and the Lord. The devil and his minions, and God and his people. That is why the Christian church is always in conflict with the world around us, because we have a different—we march to the beat of a different drum.

We follow our Lord, and that means there will be opposition. When we respond and live for God, we function differently to culture around us. It is inevitable. It will happen. Won't it? It should.

Of course it is. Why? Because as we follow God, the world will begin to treat you as an alien, because that's what you are, Christian friend. That's the word, the language. I am a stranger.

I am a pilgrim, in verse 19, on the earth. Do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. See that burning desire. See that focus. See that anticipation, and that commitment, and that desire. It's not for the world and for self. It's for God and His Word.

Lord, what would you have me do? Show me thy ways, O Lord. Thy paths, O teach thou me. We go back to that truth that we read about in Romans 5. Feed the people with truth, and the truth will have an impact. It will have a consequence. It will produce courage. That's what that passage in Romans is all about, having the courage to stand with your Lord and Savior. And as you do that, friends, you can expect opposition. You'll find that again and again throughout this psalm. Look upon my suffering and deliver me. Defend my cause and redeem me. Preserve my life according to your promise. Is that the language of someone who's having an easy time? Absolutely not. And then again, towards the end of the psalm, I think Psalm 122, ensure your servant's well-being. Let not the arrogant oppress me.

[20 : 33] Christian friend, if you're having a hard time because you're a Christian, you're in good company because they persecuted the Lord. So, what should we expect tonight? An easy ride? A seamless path?

A bed of roses? No. What we can anticipate is difficulty. And here in the psalm, we have the reality of life. My soul is consumed with longing. You rebuke the arrogant who are cursed, who stray from your commands. And they are the people who treat the psalmist as scorn and contempt. And I'm sure most Christians here tonight can relate to that. At some point in your walk, in your pilgrimage, you have felt the heat of scorn. You've felt the burning embarrassment of being treated with contempt because of your faith. Oh, the devil will use that. He will use that and he will remind you of it constantly. And he will tell you again and again, remember what they said about you? Remember how you felt? Don't tell them you're going to church. For goodness sake, hide the Bible if someone's coming in your room. Don't let them know you're a Christian. Undermining, undermining to get us silent and unconvinced and shaky and afraid and ineffective. That's what he wants. He wants ineffective

Christians in Aberdeen this evening. Friends, expect opposition. Let me just, I'm coming to a close, read to you one of the verses from John Bunyan's great hymn, He who would valiant be against all disaster. Let him with constancy follow the master. There's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

The calling of the Christian church, every man, woman, and boy and girl who loves the Lord called to be a pilgrim. Keep your focus. Expect opposition. And then thirdly this, lastly, stay the course.

Stay the course. Stay the course. Don't be Sunday Christians. Don't be seasonal Christians. Don't be weekend Christians. That's, it's a thing, but it's not the real thing. There's no substance to Sunday Christianity. You don't find that in the Bible. What you'll find in, particularly in Psalm 119, throughout its length, and it's a long, the longest Psalm we've got, is a call to be tenacious, to have a walk worthy of the gospel, to have a walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. And so we are to stay the course. Keep reading. Keep searching. Keep praying. We don't just keep the word on Sunday. We dig in on Sunday because Monday's coming. And we dig in on Monday because Tuesday's coming. And so it goes on. Until Sunday again, we can meet together. Thanks be to God. And get that nourishment and encouragement. And until then, friends, be people of the book.

[23 : 34] Do good to your servant. I will obey your word. Though rulers sit together and slander me. Your servant, there's the term again, your servant will meditate on your decrees. And that word there, decrees, is a wonderful word that speaks of God's revelation toward us. Your statutes are my delight.

And that statute is an emphasis on what God has actually physically had written for our benefit and nourishment. Your word, your statutes are my delight. They are my counselors. Friends, I didn't know what to title this. I'm not good at titling sermons. I should be by now, but I couldn't think of anything other than delighting in God's word. Delight in God's word. Your statutes are my delight. That's what sets you apart. That determination, that commitment, that faith, that tenacity, and that willingness to be shaped by the word regardless of what the world around you may think or say or do. Your statutes are my delight. They are my counselors. And he says that in the full glare of the scorn and contempt of his enemies around him. So, friend, I want to encourage you tonight to stay the course. And as you stay the course, what can you expect? Look at the very first word of this amazing psalm. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

I hope that's you tonight, my friend, that you're prepared to keep the focus, expect opposition, and stay the course. The psalmist in this section does contrast people who refuse to come in faith to the Lord. The psalmist knows the way to blessing, and he sets his life on that course to live by God's word. Verse 8, I will obey your decrees. Verse 9, how can I keep my way pure? By living according to your word. By living. By living according to your word. A number of years ago, just to finish, I had the privilege of serving in Afghanistan on a number of deployments with the 2nd Battalion Oral Regiment of Scotland. And as part of that deployment, I got to work with an Australian chaplain. His name was Dave. Typical Aussie. Full on. Didn't mess about. Great. Great guy. Good fun.

I couldn't tell you a surname, though. Can't remember what part of that country he's from, but I just remember his name. Dave. We worked together. There was a platoon of Australian soldiers as part of the deployment. And as he looked after the Aussies, and I looked after the jocks, we came together quite often. And Dave came along one day before leaving and said to me, as he was about to fly out the next day from Kabul at the end of the deployment, we shook hands and we exchanged good wishes. And as you do when you're saying goodbye to someone. Then he said something to me that I've never forgot. And no one has ever said it since. I've never said it to someone since, but I've reflected on this moment. Dave said to me as he turned away, have a good life.

I was a bit stunned. I thought, don't you have ever said that to me before? And I thought, well, it's very unlikely we're ever going to meet again. And he had just nailed it right there with that wonderful, have a good life. Great Aussie. Full of heart. Full of passion. Full of tenacity. And no messing. Said it as he saw it. Have a good life. Friend, I just want to leave that with you. How do we have a good life? Keep the word at the center. Do good to your servant and I will live. I will obey your word. Your statutes are my delight. They are my counselors. May God bless you one and all in Aberdeen or at home, wherever you are this evening, as we seek to have a good life by keeping God at the center. We'll close with a word of prayer. Lord our God, we pray that you would be with us this evening. We thank you for this opportunity that we've had to gather around your word. And we pray now, Lord, you would bless us as we reflect on this wonderful psalm. Be with the youth as they meet downstairs and enable us, Lord, as we wait on you to be people of the word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[28 : 13] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.