

People of the Word

Psalm 119:17-24

Here we are again at the beginning of another year.

I am continually amazed at how fast time goes, is anybody else with me on that?

I often say that I feel like I wake up on Monday and by the afternoon it is Friday.

It seems like one day kids are babies and the next they are all grown up.

Celebrating New Year's is a reminder to me about how fast life moves.

When the calendar flips from one year to another it is also an opportunity to stop and reflect.

There is a chance to pause for a moment and take stock as we think about another year that has flown by.

That is why I have made it my habit around the New Year to call our attention to the importance of the Bible in our daily lives by turning to Psalm 119.

Just like it is important to eat every day to sustain our bodies, it is important to sustain our souls with the reading of God's word with the goal of going from cover to cover.

I know that is a challenge. It is easy to set aside daily bible reading, it is easy to become discouraged because we fall behind in our reading plan, and it is easy to get distracted by many other things.

I know, I've been there and fallen short many times, but I can also tell you that it is worth coming back again and again until you build the habit of spending time in God's word regularly so that you are reading all of it every one to two years.

It is worth it because God's Word is a priceless gift that He has given us for our greatest good.

[In our passage for this morning **Psalm 119:17-24** we meet someone who knows and believes that God's Word is his treasure. As Christians we are to be people of the Word and the eight verses that we are looking at this morning show us something of what that looks like. I can think of no greater reputation that a person can have than to be known as someone who knows the bible and lives the bible. I hope you want that too and will give your attention to these verses with that aim in mind. The first thing we see in this text gives us something that is absolutely essential to being people of the word, it shows us that...]

Point #1 – People of the Word know their need. (Verses 17-18)

Human beings require many things to survive from moment to moment and God made us that way on purpose so that we would have constant reminders that we ultimately need Him for everything.

There are two areas of need that the psalmist points us to in verses 17-18, let's look at the first together in verse 17.

When you hear the word “bountiful” what comes to mind?

What comes to my mind is a picture of a lot of something.

I think of the Christmas dinners that I enjoyed with family and friends and how there was a bountiful supply of food.

More turkey, stuffing, gravy, and mashed potatoes than could be eaten.

It was great. That is the sort of picture that should come to our mind when we hear the word ‘bountiful’ and that is what is intended here, but in a different way than we might think at first.

We might think at first that he is going to ask for an abundance of wealth and resources, but instead we see here that he is asking the LORD to deal bountifully with His servant so that His servant might ‘live and keep His word’.

If God just does enough to keep him alive and able to obey what the Bible says, then the LORD will have provided for him in abundance.

What a radical way to view life! How often do we sit down and consider how much the LORD does from moment to moment just for us to have another breath let alone make it through the day?

And why does He do it? On account of His great mercy that is new every morning.

Wow, what an amazing way to pray. To recognize our desperate need of the LORD and to see His bounty in the most basic things and to want that prayer answered for the purpose of living under the authority of His Word.

He continues the prayer in **verse 18**.

Any human being who is alive and has the ability to read can open a Bible.

It is possible to open this book read it and think it is just another ancient book like many others and set it up on the shelf to collect dust.

It is possible to think we believe that this is the word of God open it and be affected very little by it, to even be bored by what it says.

It is possible to open this book and pick and choose for the purpose of twisting it to fit our own agenda.

The one praying this prayer knows the dangers of his sinful nature, he knows that on his own he will be blind to the glories of God’s word and so he prays, “Open my eyes...”

One of the greatest helps we could ever have in our lives is to become keenly aware that we are people in need.

[I was reminded earlier this year of how fragile and weak I am. I injured a nerve in my right shoulder blade and was in tremendous pain and I lost more than fifty percent of the strength in my arm. After about a week I finally relented and went to see about physio therapy. I never would have been able to do for myself what they did for me, my weakness made my need clear.]

That same thing is true as we approach God's Word.

If we fail to see our need, if we fail to appreciate the problem of spiritual blindness we will see just another book and we will see nothing that makes us marvel at glory of the Living God.

[As the calendar has turned to another New Year we would be wise to plead with the LORD like we are a people in need because we are. We need God's abundant grace in our lives just to be alive and have opportunity to keep His word. More than that we need Him to act kindly towards us and lift the veil from our eyes so that we might be filled with awe and wonder as we read His Word. If we can see that then we will be able to see that reading this book is about more than information, it is about being in a relationship with God. That brothers and sisters is the primary motivation for knowing and living out what the Bible says. We can see that here in the next two verses, that...]

Point #2 – People of the Word live like they want to be with God. (Verses 19-20)

Believers want to know the scriptures because we want to draw close to the LORD.

Listen to how the psalmist thinks of himself in verse 19.

We should have two ideas in our minds when we read the word sojourner here.

We should have the ideas of a temporary stay and a stranger living in a foreign land.

This same Hebrew word is used to describe Abraham in the book of Genesis.

Remember God chose Abraham to leave his home and go to another land where he would live as a stranger with the promise that his descendants would one day possess the land.

The whole time Abraham lived in Canaan he lived in a tent, a temporary dwelling, among a foreign people.

Now the writer of this psalm lived at a time when the people of Israel possessed the land that God promised to Abraham and yet he still calls himself a 'sojourner' upon the earth.

Why? Because as good as it is to live in a more permanent home, as good as it is to live in the land of Israel in the time of David and Solomon, it is still a temporary situation.

The author of Hebrews picks up on this in chapter 11 pointing to the example of Abraham using the exact same language that is used here in Psalm 119.

He argues in Hebrews 11:10 that Abraham living in the land of Canaan as a sojourner is about Abraham looking forward to living in *'the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.'*

No matter how settled we may be in buildings and culture, human beings are temporary residents upon the earth.

The Christian knows this and he knows that his real citizenship is in heaven.

Look at how the psalmist applies that knowledge to his life.

He says, 'hide not your commandments from me'.
He adds this in **verse 20**.

The temporary nature of his time on earth drives him to a constant desire to know God's Word and live it out because he wants to live in the city of God.

[My friends who are missionaries all started out with a desire to go to another country and share the gospel with the people who live there. In order to do that they had to study language and culture. Why? Because if anybody moves to a foreign country and could care less about learning the language and the culture it strongly suggests that they don't want to be there.]

Brothers and sisters it is easy to fall into that trap spiritually speaking.

It is easy to say, 'I've got all these important things to do I don't have time to spend in God's word.'

Or think to ourselves, 'God is all about grace so I don't need to care too much about how I live, or think, or feel because He is going to forgive me for it all anyway.'

The problem there is not a shortfall in the grace of God. Grace abounds beyond our sin according to Romans 5:20.

Without a doubt Jesus' death paid it all!

Our only hope as Christians is that we are forgiven because we are trusting in Jesus' life death and resurrection to make us right with God.

The depths of God's mercies are beyond what we can understand and that is a glorious truth and a steadfast hope for those that belong to Christ.

The problem with justifying laziness and evil desires by appealing to God's grace is not the lack of grace it is the lack of a changed heart.

[A changed heart, a heart that has been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit has a love for the things of the LORD because it has a desire to be with the LORD forever. We learn and live this book because we want to be with God. You see the Christian is both forgiven and transformed by the grace of God in Christ. We can never earn our way to heaven, but we can live like we want to go there. That is essential to the Christian life and it comes with a cost. If we live like we love God's ways and want to live under them that is going to put us in conflict with those that reject them. That is the next lesson in our text, that...]

Point #3 – People of the Word can be despised. (Verses 21-22)

Because God's laws are often in conflict with what people want, when we stand firm in the truth we may find ourselves attacked and hated on occasion.

Look with me at the observation that is made in verse 21.

This very easy could have been a plea made to the LORD as we find in a number of places in the Psalms, but instead he simply declares that God deals with the *insolent* who are labeled here as *accursed ones*.

By making this a statement rather than a plea he turns this prayer into a statement of faith and trust in the LORD.

The *insolent* are those who are proud before God.

These are the ones who say, “I don’t need God and I don’t care what He thinks” and that is why they ‘*wander from [God’s] commandments.*’

Now if we adopt the view of moral relativism, we would find ourselves on good terms with such people.

Moral relativism means that you are free to believe and do whatever you feel is right for you and so you are free to think, act, and feel however you want and it is all good.

That view has crept its way into the church under the disguise of humility.

People will say things like, “Who am I to say what is right and wrong? I am just going to accept everyone’s ideas about how they want to live.

It sounds very kind and compassionate and that is likely one of the reasons why it has gained so much traction, but if we stop and think about it for a second we will see that it is a repackaged form of pride.

At the end of the day the view of moral relativism is just another way of saying, “You don’t have to listen to God.”

The view of verse 21 and of the whole Bible is that God, as the creator and sustainer of the universe, gives laws out of the goodness of His nature that apply to everyone.

The world would have you believe that Christians are arrogant for saying everyone has to listen to what the Bible says, but that is actually the humble thing to do.

Ask yourself, “Is it more humble to say, ‘I am creature who must submit to my Creator’ or ‘I can make up my own rules and if there is a creator he better be ok with it.’”

Brothers and sisters it is simply the height of pride to say, “I don’t have to listen to the One Who made all things.”

Because that is true the prayer of **verse 22** makes perfect sense.

He is the object of ‘scorn’ and ‘contempt’ because he believes that God’s laws are not only good to obey, but that they must be obeyed.

When you believe that and are willing to say it, people who want to live their own way are going to get upset and angry and often speak and act towards you in hurtful ways.

[We see this right at the beginning of history. The first two brothers mentioned in the Bible are men by the name of Cain and Abel. They both came with offerings to the LORD, but only Abel’s was accepted. That made Cain upset and the LORD told him to do what was right, but what did he

do instead? He killed his brother. Why? Because he didn't want what was right and hated his brother who did.]

The sinful condition remains the same today. Thankfully most are restrained from murder, but the same distaste for the rule of God remains.

It is very important to say at this point that our aim in holding fast to the word of God ought to be loving the LORD and seeking the highest good of others.

If people have scorn and contempt for us simply because we are uncaring and rude then we are missing the mark of what this passage is talking about.

This is talking to us about loving the LORD and seeing His Word for what it is, the highest authority for every aspect of human life.

[Making that claim is at times going to be unpopular, even amongst people who go to church. Being despised if tough. I have often thought to myself it would be much easier to just throw in the towel and go along to get along. I am quite sure it would be easier for a time, but in the end it would be nothing but misery. That is why I am thankful for this final encouragement from our text. The psalmist is very clear that being people of the word is hard, but he also shows us here that...]

Point #4 – People of the Word persevere with joy. (Verses 23-24)

Even though it may feel at times as though everything and everyone is against us, the goodness of the Bible remains unchanged and we can be content in that.

Having just prayed for the LORD to take from him 'scorn and contempt' he writes this in verse 23.

This is likely as serious as it gets.

The fact that 'princes' are plotting against him almost certainly means that his life is in danger.

These are people of influence and power and if this psalm is written by the king, as many commentators suggest, it would mean that their aim is to remove him from the throne.

There are really only two options in that regard in the ancient world, either exile or death.

Most of the time it was death that removed a king from his throne.

The fact that he is feeling scorn and contempt suggests those that are plotting against him are having some success at getting their way.

Things are looking really bad.

This is one of those moments that examine the depth of a person's trust in the LORD.

These types of situations should be no surprise for people of the word.

God is very clear about things like suffering and hardship coming into the lives of people who resolve to follow His ways.

Moments like the one being described here are opportunities to see the genuineness of saving faith worked out in practical everyday life.

When things are looking bad what does God's servant do here?

It says he, "...meditates on [the LORD's] statutes."

The word meditate means to fix something in one's mind and spend time reflecting on what it means.

Rather than turning from the LORD in his trial, he wants to go deeper in his understanding and he wants his trust to grow.

He is persevering in the Word, but it is more than simply persevering according to **verse 24**.

This is the fruit of the prayer he prayed in verse 18.

While we can always go deeper and see more *wondrous things* in the Word of God, if we can see enough to captivate our hearts with delight then we have what we need most as Christians.

What we need most as Christians is to see that the treasures that God gives us in Christ are greater than anything else in the whole of creation.

I love what Matthew Henry writes on this verse, he says, "*Sometimes it proves that the comforts of the word of God are most pleasant to a gracious soul when other comforts are embittered.*"

That is when times seems the worst God's Word becomes the most precious.

The more we delight in God's Word the more likely we are to hold on to it.

[Are there any kids here that like video games? How many of you gave up playing video games when you didn't win the first time? How about the second or third time you lost? How many of you are still playing video games that you have lost at many times? Why do you keep playing? Because it is fun right? Because you like it you keeping coming back for more.]

Oh that the testimonies of the LORD would be so sweet to us today because delight enables us to persevere.

If we persevere we will find the end that God's Word has been the best of counselors because it leads to eternal life in Christ.

As we stand at the beginning of a new year let us resolve to be people of the Word.

People who know that we need God to act bountifully on our behalf.

People who live like we want to be with the LORD.

People who though we may be despised for holding onto what God says persevere in our faith sustained by the Word because it is our delight.