

Introduction...

- Ps 119** Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!
- ² Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,
- ³ who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!
- ⁴ You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
- ⁵ Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
- ⁶ Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
- ⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules.
- ⁸ I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

This morning we are kicking off a new summer sermon series on the Word of God: The Doctrine of Scripture. We will be exploring what we believe about the Bible or better yet, what the Bible teaches about itself.

Now, I am sure that as soon as you heard me say that you were thinking in your mind, "Wow, this is going to be incredible!" Does the thought of studying the Doctrine of Scripture excite you, comfort you, fill you with joy? Does it make you want to shout and praise God? Does it make you want to jump up and run to tell others, "We are studying the Doctrine of God's Word?" Probably, not.

I'm being a bit silly, but I want to make a specific point and it is that when we come to this subject we know that it will engage our minds. This is a "thinking cap" topic, for sure; but as we read Psalm 119 we also see that this is a subject that should move our hearts.

Listen to how the Psalmist describes his feelings about God's Word:

- 1. Delight (10 times) – v. 14** In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. **V. 174** I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. (Duck Tales and Uncle Scrooge swimming in money...)
- 2. Sweet Like Honey – V. 103** How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (God's Word is more satisfying than the best dessert in the world)
- 3. Love (18 times) – V. 97** Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day; **V. 127** Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. (He would rather read and obey the commands of God than to have fine gold in his hands)
- 4. Joy – V. 111** Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.

As he meditates on God's Word the psalmist does more than think deep thoughts, he also feels deeply in his heart and out of his Spirit-inspired pen comes poetry. Psalm 119 is a poem, the longest love poem in the Bible and the object of its love is the Word of the Living God. It is a poem of praise to the Word of God and it is masterfully constructed.

The first letter in each line in each section starts with a specific letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So that verses 1-8 all begin with *Aleph* and verses 9-16 all begin with the letter *Beth*, and so on through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

How many of you have ever tried your hand at writing poetry? If you have then you know this is no small feat. The author of this poem took His time and worked extremely hard to write in such a way that this Psalm would instruct our mind, challenge our soul, and awaken our heart to the wonder of God's Word.

He uses a handful of terms over and over: law, commandments, statutes, rules, testimonies, promises or simply word. Out of 176 verses, 169 of them contain at least one of these terms and sometimes we find more than one. **These words represent various shades of meaning but they are all pointing to one idea, this Psalm is about God's verbal revelation that has been written down for us.** As the Psalmist meditates on what God has said, His mind, soul and body are overwhelmed at the beauty, truth and power of God's Word and that is what I want for myself, for you, for us.

Transition...

Now, I understand that some of you think the Bible is great and all, but it's a bit odd for people to get too excited about it. After all, isn't the Bible a combination of God's Word mixed with human thinking? Didn't these ancient authors simply put words in God's mouth? The short answer is, no! In the weeks to come we are going to show you why that's not true and why you can trust that the Bible is God's Word and that you should delight in it like the Psalmist.

Some of you may have a different reaction. You may not have any particular problem with the Bible being God's Word, but it just seems so old and dull. It's hard to read at times and you would much rather watch a movie or play a video game. I hope that in the weeks to come you will begin to see that in the most serious possible way, your life and your eternity depends upon this Word.

This morning's sermon is an introduction to our summer study and we are going to look at the first section of Psalm 119 where we learn the **Importance** of Scripture, the **Imperative** of Scripture, the **Impact** of Scripture, and the **Necessity** of God's grace.

Sermon Focus...

I. The Importance of Scripture for Everyone (Vv. 1-1-3)

Ps 119 Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!

2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,

3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!

We have seen this word **Blessed** before and it means **Happy or Fortunate**. You could almost substitute the term happy each time you see the word blessed and if you did, it would read like this, "Happy are those whose way is blameless...Happy are those who walk in the law of the Lord...Happy are those who keep His testimonies...**Happy are those who seek Him with their whole heart.**" This sounds great because we all want to be happy.

Blaise Pascal wrote,

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. [159] The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.¹

Everyone wants to be happy and we have an incredible number of options available to us all promising to secure us that happiness. I did a search online and found over 1 billion search results for the phrase, "How to be happy." Some of the options include: Happiness through better mental health, happiness through better physical health, happiness through better spiritual health,

¹ Pascal, Blaise. Pascal's Pensées (p. 97). Kindle Edition.

happiness through better sex, better food, better parties, better jobs, better friends, better lifestyle, better entertainment, a better house, better car, better spouse...

It's interesting to me that the common idea is that happiness will be achieved by having more of what we already have. Or maybe just a bigger, better or newer one. **The pursuit of happiness in our culture is being fueled by the consumerism and materialism of our culture. In other words, the marketers have won in that they have made us think that happiness is just a credit card swipe away.**

But something even more interesting is the fact that the pursuit of happiness is universal. We all want to be happy and at present, most of us are convinced that true happiness is not something we have but something we must find. And yet, the Bible tells us that we are looking in the wrong places.

The Bible tells us that the happiness we are seeking is actually something deeper. It is the longing of our soul. Our hearts are seeking a happiness that goes beyond circumstances, beyond the simple feelings of the 5 senses.

A steak might make a man happy for a couple of hours, but it doesn't bring joy to his soul. The epicureans tried that and they ended up morbidly obese, alcoholics with heart problems and type 2 diabetes. They didn't end up with lasting joy.

The human longing for joy is something that rests beyond the flesh at the soul level of man, and therefore cannot be satisfied with the temporal things of this world. Money, success, pleasure, recognition and power are only the opiates that numbs our deep longing for joy that cries out from the soul of man.

In the Scriptures, God is going to tell us over and over that the deep satisfying happiness that we are seeking is not best understood in relation to things but in relation to Him. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us that, *'God has placed eternity into man's heart...'* A longing for God has been planted in our hearts and we seek to fill it with things that simply cannot satisfy.

(Illus. No one illustrates the vanity of this quest better than Solomon who sets out to find joy and pleasure by testing everything under the sun. ***In Ecclesiastes 2:1-11***

- He sought for joy in happiness and laughter...(v. 2)
- He sought to find joy in wine...(v. 3)
- He sought to find joy in achievement, building the temple of God, homes for himself and his wives...(v. 4)
- He sought joy by being green and planting vineyards, national parks, forests, all kinds of fruit trees. (v. 5-6)
- He sought joy in stuff/possessions hoarding gold and silver, horses farms and cattle ranches...(v. 7-8)
- He sought joy in entertainment (v. 8)
- He sought joy in women and sexual pleasure...(v. 8)

And just in case he left something out in verse 10 he says that whatever he saw he took it. If it looked like it could satisfy the longing of his soul he tried it. But at the end of his quest Solomon said, "I tried it all and it was good but it couldn't satisfy my soul's longing." It was like chasing the wind. It was vanity. It left him empty and still longing to be filled.

That longing for happiness, that pursuit of joy in the human experience will always feel like chasing the wind if we try to satisfy it with the things of this world. **But notice that the Psalmist doesn't offer us happiness based on worldly things, He talks about happiness that comes to those who walk with God according to His Word.**

God has given us His Word to show us that the way to happiness is actually the way to Him.

True happiness, lasting joy comes when we are reunited with our creator to have relationship with Him. That is where the Word is guiding us. To walk in the way or in the law of the Lord is to have your heart and mind aligned with God. It is to believe, feel and live in relationship to God.

The phrase **His Testimonies** is a reference to what God has said and revealed about Himself. To keep His testimonies is to believe and live affirming the truth about God that He has revealed to us in His Word.

Happy are those who seek Him with our whole heart, walking in His ways. One of the most comforting promises in Scripture is that those who seek Him will find Him. Those who cry out to Him, He will hear.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest.**" We read in **Romans 10:11** "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Why is the Word of God so important for everyone? Because in the Word, God has made it clear to us that the universal human longing for happiness, which we all feel, can only be satisfied by the One who gave us that longing in the first place.

II. The Imperative of Scripture (V. 4)

4 You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

Notice the shift from verses 1-3 that spoke of the blessings that God's Word holds out for everyone and verse 4 where the Psalmist addresses God directly. "**You** have commanded..." **God has brought the full weight of His authority into being by declaring what He requires of us.** In His Word, God has made it clear that we are the creature and He is the Creator. He is the lawgiver and we are subject to His commands.

This poses a problem for us because we have all fallen short. We have all sinned and failed to keep His law diligently. That pursuit of happiness has taken us out of God's will. Our sinful desires have caused us to transgress the law of God. Our rebellious nature has driven us to deny God's authority and rule. **You could say that this is the bad news and it is in the Scriptures that we come to understand that this bad news applies to us.**

You see, that pursuit of happiness that marks the human experience is fueled by the fact that we are separated from God because of our sin. We know that something is wrong, and we are trying to make it right on our own. The deep longing in our soul is a constant reminder that things aren't as they should be, that we aren't as we should be. In order to help us understand what is wrong and what went wrong, God has chosen to tell us the story.

Our story began in the garden where God and man were at peace. Then rebellion entered the Garden. Through Adam and Eve that rebellion has spread throughout the world resulting in a separation between God and man. We can't come into His presence anymore because the peace we

once had with Him is gone. He cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden and barred the way back in. But that is not where the story ends.

As the story continues to unfold God tells us, in His Word, that He is the one who is going to make things right between us. He is going to send His Messiah who will take our sin away and bring us back to God. **That's where Jesus comes into the story.**

Jesus came and lived the life we couldn't live, He died the death we deserved to die, He paid the price to set us free and rose from death to show that His work was finished. Then, when He was on the road talking with two of His disciples He pointed out to them that all of the Scriptures, from Moses all the way through the prophets, were about Him.

One of the most beautiful and incredible things that you will learn as you read and study the Bible is that it is not a loose collection of religious stories and tales aimed to teach us how to be moral people. Instead, it is one massive story about the relationship between God and His creation. The Bible is one book written by 40 authors on three different continents over a period of 2000 years and it is all telling One Story of how God would redeem His people from their sin by the loving sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

God could have simply left us to our fate. He could have locked us out in the cold, but He chose to reach out to us. In His mercy He called out to us, He spoke so that we could hear, and in His Word His voice can still be heard. God has preserved His Word for us so that we can read it and be changed by it.

Let's look next at the impact of the Scriptures...

III. The Impact of the Scriptures (V. 5-7)

- 5 Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
- 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
- 7 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules.

Once again, the focus shifts. Verse 4 directly addressed God as the giver of commands but here in verse 5 the focus is on our individual response to God's Word. "Oh, that **my** ways be steadfast...then **I** shall not be put to shame...**my** eyes are fixed...**I** will praise...**I** learn."

It is not enough that we affirm the Bible to be the Word of God, we must read, study and apply it in our lives. The Bible is not a prop. It is not a decoration for the mantle. It is not a space-filler that fits on the bookcase just right. God has given us His Word so that it will impact our lives. He wants His Word to guide our way, to comfort us and keep us from shame, to teach us, to grow us, and to elicit praise from our heart.

There is such a thing as true piety. It comes when the law of God has done it's work of showing us our need of God's grace. It comes when the Word of God reveals that Christ alone can reconcile us to God and satisfy our souls longing for peace and happiness. It flows out of a life that sees the Scriptures as sweeter than honey and the joy of our hearts. Then we can walk with God in faithfulness, guided by His Spirit and His Word.

But notice verse 8,

- 8 I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

One of the lessons that the Scriptures make very clear to us is that we are never beyond our need of God's grace. "I will keep your statutes, but don't turn away from me, don't stop guiding me, don't stop loving me, don't stop forgiving me, cleansing me and helping me."

Conclusion...

Don't you see that the Word of God reveals all of this to us. It reveals that the universal human pursuit of happiness is actually our soul's longing to be made right with our Creator. It reveals that the reason we aren't right with God is because we have sinned against Him. It reveals that in order to be made right we need to follow where the Scriptures lead us and that is to put our hope in Christ alone for salvation. It teaches that we will never outgrow our need of God's sustaining grace.

So here is the million-dollar question, are you still seeking to fill the longing of your soul with the things of this world only to find yourself empty and still seeking?

Each of us has a longing in our soul which only Christ can fill and until we rest in him our souls will never find satisfaction. So my hope for us all this morning is the hope of Augustine which is this

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you;
so lead us by your Spirit
that in this life we may live to your glory
and in the life to come enjoy you for ever;
through Jesus Christ our Lord