

"To See His Word So We Can Live Clearer"

Psalm 119:17-24

Perhaps some of you have come across predictions made years ago about what life would be like in the year 2020. Well, here we are. Some of the predictions that didn't come close were;

- life expectancy would be at 100
- books will be dead
- cars will not need to be refueled for months
- anti-gravity belts will revolutionize warfare
- people will have walked on Mars

But there were some predictions that weren't far off:

- computers will be invisible [all implanted in devices and our bodies; not far off from happening]
- our every move will be tracked [its possible]
- we'll have self-driving cars [they are out there but still working out the kinks]
- we'll have personal companions that will be connected to all our devices ['Hey Alexa, that's not true is it?']

However, if we were asked 30-40 years ago that in the year 2020 children would be taught in our schools that they can be boys, girls, trans or whatever they want to be; that one-man and one-woman marriage definition would become unpopular or that society would become intolerant towards Christians by and large, we would have thought it would never happen. Yet here we are.

God saw it all coming of course, so we shouldn't be surprised. He warned us 2000 years ago in 2 Tim. 3:1-4,

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Maybe we need to have our eyes opened more to the ungodliness around us, but I think most of us are aware and so we need to have our eyes opened more clearly to what God says in His Word so we can know how to live wisely in whatever age we live in. That has never changed which is why the Bible is so unique in its relevancy and practicality. I do think we continually need to have our eyes open to see God's work around us, the many needs we sometimes are blind too and the need to see our world as He and Jesus see it. And the best way to be prepared for that is to have our eyes opened to His Word.

There's a prayer in Ps. 119:18 which should become our theme verse for the year and I pray our daily prayer;

¹⁸ Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Ps. 119 is a fascinating piece of Scripture. It contains 176 verses divided evenly in 22 stanzas, each 8 verse stanza starting with a word that begins with the next equivalent letter in the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The first eight verse stanza all begin with the letter *aleph* [A], the next 8 verse stanza (vv.9-16) begin with *beth* and the next stanza, vv.17-24 [our

focus] begins with the letter *gimel*. You see these headings even in our English bibles. The unnamed author uses 8 key Hebrew words for the 'Word' that he tries to use in each 8 verse stanza (usually at least 6) so that by the end of the song we have 20-24 uses of each Hebrew synonym for 'Word'.

Why the emphasis on 8? While seven is often the number of perfection, eight is sometimes used as a way of saying, this is even better; complete, the best of the best. When Samuel anointed Jesse's son David to be king, David was the 8th son. When Amos prophesies judgment against Israel's neighbours he lists six neighbours and then lists Israel in the north and finally Judah as the 8th, meaning the message was primarily against them. Zechariah has 8 visions from God and there are a few more.

So Ps. 119 is the poem of poems about the 8 sided diamond of the Word of God. The Word is perfect, complete and is all we need. And yet, the Psalmist wrote this when he only had a third of the Old Testament? Even that was able to speak to the hearts of God's people for what they needed.

But why the need to pray for God to open his eyes so he could see wonderful things in God's Law? The general context of the entire psalm is found in the first 8 verses, in particular vv. 1-2,

- ¹ *Blessed are they whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD.*
- ² *Blessed are they who keep his statutes
and seek him with all their heart.*

The psalmist tells us God wants to bless us by walking/living according to His laws which is synonymous with seeking Him with our whole heart. Each 8 verse stanza has this as its overarching theme within a mini context encapsulated in these 8 verses. In the eight verses we want to focus on this morning we want to ask why does the writer pray that God would open his eyes that he may see wonderful things in God's laws? Doesn't that automatically happen? No, of course not. How many times have we read God's Word while distracted and got nothing from it? How often haven't we read God's Word as something we have to do to check off a reading plan or as part of our daily routine? And how often haven't we read God's Word when feeling stressed, persecuted or worried about a problem and yet didn't let God speak to us? Did we ask God to show us wonderful, amazing things? Did we ask Him to help us understand it? Why do we just assume we will? There are many reasons why we don't understand it or why we don't ask to understand it. The psalmist only touches on a few in these 8 verses but ones that are relevant to all of us.

Vv. 1-2 tell us we will be blessed if we walk according to God's Word; in other words hear it and do it. So there's an assumption that there's a need to link the two because as we all know we are guilty of hearing it but not always doing it. Here the psalmist gives us a major reason in v. 19,

- ¹⁹ *I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.*

One of the biggest reasons we need to pray that God would open our eyes to understand His Word when we read it is because,

We are Strangers to God & His Word by Nature **(Vv.17-20)**

What did he mean he was a 'stranger on earth'? Usually the word for "stranger" is applied to a non-Jew who is dwelling in the land of Israel and as such has no rights. Surely it was a Jewish person who wrote this and was so familiar with God and the Law. And yet he calls himself a 'stranger on

earth', one who is by nature separated from God, has no rights before God and is totally dependent on God's grace. I grasp this from v.17 when he says,

¹⁷ Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word

Twice in these 8 verses (v.17, 23) he calls himself God's servant. That implies he understands fully who God is and who he is. One who

Became God's servant and found life (v.17)

His opening prayer in these 8 verses sets the context as we see in the other 7 verses. As one who has placed his faith in God, believing God's words to be true, he finds himself in the minority where he lives. He is surrounded by the arrogant who stray from God's commands (v.21), who are verbally assaulting him (vv.22-23). This is another reason why he calls himself 'stranger'. He's not welcome by the world system, by the majority who reject God. So he prays in the midst of his persecution that God would be good to him and he might experience life. 'That he might live' may mean physically because he was being threatened. Or it may also mean that he can find hope and meaning in the midst of opposition because he is God's servant and finds the strength of that hope in trusting God's Word.

So now his prayer to open his eyes as he reads God's Word makes more sense. So he

Asks God to open his eyes (v.18)

For two reasons:

1] To understand God's Word.

The word for 'see' or 'behold' means to understand it, to comprehend what is being said. Since the Word of God is from God, it is only understandable to those who know God. Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:12,

¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

While the unsaved cannot truly understand God's Word apart from the work of the Spirit, so we also still need the Spirit to help us see what we need to see and understand it so we

2] Respond to God's Word

The word for 'wonderful things' is the word used to talk about the 'wonders' God performs to save His people; specifically for Israel, the exodus. So often the Old Testament prophets when calling Israel to repent reminded them of the miracles and God's rescuing them out of Egypt. His acts of salvation. The prayer to open his eyes to see 'wonderful things' in God's Word can include amazing truths we hadn't seen yet but it primarily means the way God has worked in the lives of His people as He has revealed it to us in His Holy record. It is not a prayer to see things that are not found in His Word – extra things – but a prayer in the midst of feeling oppressed and outnumbered [a stranger] that God would remind him as he opens the Word to see again how God has marvellously rescued His

people over and over again. Because he needs rescuing at this time. 'Do not hide' is just the negative half of saying 'open my eyes'. It is poetry and the most common form of Hebrew poetry is a parallelism; to repeat what was said in a similar way or opposite way OR to make a contrast.

He wants to be reminded of how God works so he can take that Word and apply it to his situation, acting in faith that God will be good to His servants once again because they keep His Word. And when we do this

We find satisfaction in His Word (v.20)

²⁰ My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.

All the translations emphasize this overwhelming desire to know God's Words because God's Words give peace, joy and contentment to us. 'Taste and see that the Lord is good'. The more we experience Him the more we know Him and the more we want to know Him. Ps. 63:1-5 grasps this well,

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you,
in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.
³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.
⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

David knew God. Had experienced powerful worship and joy in talking about God with others so that he wants to do that all his life. Knowing God is like tasting fantastic food. You just want more.

The other reason why we need to pray for God to show us the way He works in His word is because,

We are Surrounded by Enemies of God & His Word **(Vv.21-24)**

... so we need encouragement from God's Word to help us persevere through the opposition we receive. What truths did the Psalmist remind himself of when God opened his eyes to His Word? That those who oppose God ...

Will suffer for their rejection (v.21)

²¹ You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands.

The word 'rebuke' has the idea of convict, disapprove. When we read God's Word we remember who spends eternity with God and who doesn't. Those who keep God's Word are those who are blessed with eternal life while those who reject God's Word will suffer God's disapproval. It is reality. It is something we need to give more thought to – not just as a comfort for us because we know God – but a burden for those who don't know God and are totally unprepared for the end of their life.

God doesn't curse anyone. We all inherited the curse from Adam and Eve when they first sinned. Everyone who's born inherits a sin nature and must confess their sin and need of saving. God provides salvation through faith in His Son Jesus who alone can pay for our sins.

Our reward awaits us so in the meantime the psalmist reminds us of the reality that

We will be ridiculed for our faith (vv.22a, 23a)

He says in v.22 that he was scorned and treated with contempt. And in v.23 he says even princes (people in power) sit together and slander (or speak against) him. Our day is no different. We read in print or in social media the slander and contempt people have for Jesus followers. People don't mind a Jesus who's just a good moral teacher but when we talk about Him as Saviour, Lord, King of the world and the solution to everyone's problems, they get upset because we indicate they need saving because they have a problem called sin.

So how did he handle the ridicule and slander? He prayed that God would open his eyes to see the way God saves us and meets our needs.

I keep your statutes. ... your servant will meditate on your decrees.
²⁴ *Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.*

Five times in Ps. 119 the writer sings that the Word of God is his delight; that which gives supreme satisfaction. It's a fun sounding word, "Shashua". So we need to pray that God would open our eyes to His Word everyone time we open it

So we stay anchored (v.24)

All too often the slander and ridicule throw us off balance. We lose focus. We get rattled. We forget the great truths of God and the promises He holds out for us. We need to our eyes opened to see and understand what God says about us and the world, not our peers, not social media. Not the princes of this world. God has the last word. His Word will never fail. Not one jot or tittle Jesus said would disappear from God's Word until everything is fulfilled.

So as we begin 2020 and we hear negativity towards God, Jesus and us as his followers, remember His Word. Read it, meditate on it and most importantly pray this verse when you open it: *'Open my eyes Lord to see the wonderful promises and reminders in Your Word about how you work. About how You are in control of this world and that I find true joy and satisfaction in You. Help me to see that those who oppose You don't know You and are unprepared for life's end. Strengthen me so I can see them as You see them and help them know You through the very Word they ridicule and reject.*

And when God opens your eyes to see things you need to do, obey Him. Keep His Words. Be counselled by them. Know them and share them.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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