

Psalm 119:105-112 (NUN)

The Implications of Light and Lamp

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path – v. 105

This section of the 119th Psalm contains a verse that is perhaps the most familiar verse in the entire Psalm to Christians. Verse 105 tells us *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*. I can do no better than Spurgeon in providing an analysis of this verse. He writes:

We are walkers through the city of this world, and we are often called to go out into its darkness; let us never venture there without the light giving word, lest we slip with our feet. Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the word of the Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way. Having no fixed lamps in eastern towns, in old time each passenger carried a lantern with him that he might not fall into the open sewer, or stumble over the heaps of ordure which defiled the road. This is a true picture of our path through this dark world: we should not know the way, or how to walk in it, if Scripture, like a blazing flambeau, did not reveal it. One of the most practical benefits of Holy Writ is guidance in the acts of daily life: it is not sent to astound us with its brilliance, but to guide us by its instruction. It is true the head needs illumination, but even more the feet need direction, else head and feet may both fall into a ditch. Happy is the man who personally appropriates God's word, and practically uses it as his comfort and counselor, — a lamp to his own feet.

It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times. David guided his own steps by it, and also saw the difficulties of his road by its beams. He who walks in darkness is sure, sooner or later, to stumble; while he who walks by the light of day, or by the lamp of night, stumbleth not, but keeps his uprightness. Ignorance is painful upon practical subjects; it breeds indecision and suspense, and these are uncomfortable: the word of God, by imparting heavenly knowledge, leads to decision, and when that is followed by determined resolution, as in this case, it brings with it great restfulness of heart.

When Spurgeon writes of guidance that leads to decision and determined resolution he is referring to the text and its connection to the next verse. Note how vv. 105 and 106 can relate to each other then: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*

Recall, if you will, that we've noted throughout the course of our studies in this Psalm that this is a Psalm about God's Word. This Psalm more than any other source within the Bible teaches the reader about the Bible. You may be asked by someone who is making inquiry about your religion, or someone who is interested in theology – *what book would you recommend about the Bible?*

To those who think first about outside sources B.B. Warfield's book *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* may come readily to mind. But if you want to recommend

something shorter and perhaps easier as well as practical with the added benefit of being inspired then the 119th Psalm could be a good recommendation. You certainly learn through this Psalm that God is the author of his word. You learn how the word is to function – you learn how this word leads you to God himself. And now the emphasis in this particular section of the Psalm is on how the word of God functions as our guide through life. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* Another commentator notes: What we all want, is not to see wonders that daze us, and to be rapt in ecstatic visions and splendors, but a little light on the dark and troubled path we have to tread, a lamp that will burn steadfastly and helpfully over the work we have to do. The stars are infinitely more sublime, meteors infinitely more superb and dazzling; but the lamp shining in a dark place is infinitely closer to our practical needs.

What I would like to do this morning is focus on this familiar verse in Psalm 119 and consider how God's word is our lamp and our light. It is only by the guidance of this word that leads to Christ that we can truly say: I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

And in order that you might understand and appreciate and thus appropriate the truth of this text by making God's word your lamp and your light I would invite you to consider with me just a few of the implications that arise from the text. The first implication is this:

I. We Live in a World of Darkness and Need the Light of God's Word

We know from the book of Genesis that in the beginning God commanded the light to shine out of darkness. *Let there be light* was God's command *and there was light.* And in that original light Adam and Eve saw God. They not only saw him in the intimacy of their daily walks with him in the garden in the cool of the day but they saw him in everything that he had created. The light of natural revelation shone brightly and they had the capacity to see and read it aright.

It remains an impenetrable mystery how man, created in the image of God, created with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness could go from such glorious light into spiritual darkness. There's a sense in which God commanded the light to shine and then man was allowed by God, in the purpose of God to show his grace, to counter that command by saying in effect by his sinful action *Let there be darkness.* And darkness has pervaded man's heart ever since that tragic fall.

This is not to say that the light of God was completely extinguished. That light in creation still shines and shines brightly enough to render men inexcusable in their sin. Paul writes to the Romans what happened to man as a result of sin. So in Rom. 1:21,22 we read *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.* He adds this word of exhortation in Eph. 4:17,18

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

Such is the strength of the sinner's depravity and such is the foolishness of his darkened heart that he's blind and yet doesn't even see his need for light. His darkness is his light. After healing a man of his blindness, the Pharisees who tried desperately to explain away the miracle ask Christ in Jn. 9:40 *Are we blind also?* – to which Christ replies *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.* Their unwillingness to admit their blindness coupled with their pride that told them they could see actually kept them in their blindness and thus prevented them from coming to the light of Christ even though Christ had just demonstrated his deity through healing a blind man.

The good news of the gospel is, of course, that Christ has invaded the darkness of man's making. So we read of Christ the incarnate Word in Jn. 1 that he is the Light, that *In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

It wasn't enough, you see, for Christ, the source of life to come into this dark world and shine brightly through his teachings and through many demonstrations of his deity, for not only could men in their darkness not comprehend this light, but as John tells us a couple of chapters later in 3:19 *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

This is the backdrop of salvation, then – men in their foolish pride have their hearts darkened. Men in their blindness refuse to come to the light – indeed they hate the light and love their darkness mistake their darkness for their light. And when you read in the gospels the accounts of Christ's sufferings and death, it appears for a brief moment in time that the darkness has prevailed when Christ is apprehended and put through a mock trial and condemned to die and is then nailed to a cross.

It certainly seems appropriate, doesn't it, that during the time of Christ's suffering on Calvary's cross darkness covers the scene from the sixth to the ninth hour. Thank God this morning that the darkness of Calvary's cross and the darkness of a sealed tomb had to yield to the brightness of resurrection light.

But even then, darkness still ruled in man's heart so much so that Roman soldiers must be bribed into saying that his disciples came by night and stole the body of Christ. Darkness still held sway over men's hearts and continues to hold sway over men's heart right up the day in which we live.

And so what is needed is another command from God – a command similar to the first one which said *Let there be light.* Thank God such commands are given today. So we read in 2Cor. 4:6 *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

And how is this light given today? How does this light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ penetrate the darkness of sinful man's stubborn hearts? It does so through the word of God. It is as that word is made effectual by the Spirit of God that the darkness of man's heart is dispelled by the light of the gospel.

Has that light penetrated your heart and dispelled the darkness of your heart? Here's how you can tell – you own the truth of your blindness. You confess that you were once lost but now you're found, was blind, but now you see – and the thing you see is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Salvation has brought you to him. The word has functioned as lamp to your feet and a light to your path to bring you to Christ.

And that word continues to function as a lamp for your feet and a light for your path. And you still need that light for even though by God's grace and by God's power the light of the gospel has penetrated your darkened heart, you still live in a world that is steeped in darkness and you still possess an old nature that would be ruled by the darkness of sin. So Christ says in Jn. 8:12 *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

Do you see the present and perpetual application of this saying? *He that followeth me* Christ says. This must become a daily practice and the way it's done is through God's word. It continues to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Our need for it is continual. This is the first implication of our text, then – we live in a darkened world and have need for the light of God's word. The second implication that arises from our text is this:

II. Our Walk with the Lord is Personal and Intimate

Underscore the word that occurs twice in the text – *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a lamp unto my path.*

Do you see how personal the text becomes? The Psalmist is making a singular application to himself. He is not viewing the matter corporately as is sometimes the case. He's making a singular and individual application to himself – my feet, and my path. There is a sense, of course, in which Christians are all on the same path. Christ is the way, the truth and the life and there is only one way in that respect. *No man cometh to the Father, but by me* he says in John's gospel. So in that respect there is no other way and there is no other entrance to life but through Christ.

Notwithstanding the singleness of the narrow way to life, it is, nevertheless true that there is great variety to the ways in which we serve the Lord. Paul demonstrates this through the analogy of the body in 1Cor. 12:14-18: *For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*

There are, then, varying functions that Christians must perform within the body and there are varying circumstances that we as Christians face. I dare say that when it comes to our trials and challenges there's a sense in which no two Christians face the same identical things. The book of Job teaches us that God personally directs the trials of every single Christian. He determines the ingredients to that trial and he determines the length of our trials and he determines the boundaries to our trials.

What this indicates to us, then, is that each one of us has a path to pursue that is yours and no one else's. *Thy word is a lamp unto my path and a light unto my feet.* It's important that you understand just how God's word functions as a lamp and a light to your path. This raises what is an age old question – how does a Christian discern God's will for his life? How does a young Christian discern his calling or his vocation? How does a Christian discern who he is to marry? How does he discern how he's to serve Christ in the church?

Some Christians have wrong ideas about how the word of God functions in these capacities. John Wesley is known to have randomly opened his Bible in such a way that he would simply let it fall open to any given page and then he would seek answers to specific questions regarding God's will for his life from where ever his Bible happened to open. And while it's true that a verse can be used by the Spirit of God to capture our hearts and direct us in a specific course of action there's a danger to becoming superstitious about the way we seek light for our path.

There's an orange juice commercial that is seen on television these days that is rather amusing. The scene begins as a business meeting with a typical working Mom seated at the breakfast table along with the various people she is going to encounter that day. She's asks them what's on the agenda for that day. Her teenage daughter then reports that at 7:45 she's going to roll her eyes at her Mom when her Mom tells her what she's to wear for school that day. Next is a Cable service technician that informs the Mom that she's going to wait for him from 7-9 but he's not going to show up until 11 thus making her late for work. A building maintenance man then reports that when this Mom arrives at work she will discover that the elevators are not working and she's going to have to climb 18 flights of stairs. The principal of her daughter's school then informs her that 2:45 she's going to call the Mom to report to her that her daughter has been involved in a scuffle. After being made aware in advance of all these difficulties the Mom then takes a drink of her orange juice and exclaims that it's a good thing she's had her orange juice for that day.

Now you will never open your Bible and learn in advance that you're going to have to climb 18 flights of stairs or that you're going to be late to work or that you're going to face specific challenges from your children. Nor will you ever open your Bible and see the words on a page which say to you that you're supposed to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or an auto mechanic. You'll never see a statement that says you're suppose to marry so and so and you're suppose to move to such and such a city. That's not how God's word sheds light on your path.

What the word of God will do, however, is instruct you on the ways that are pleasing to the Lord so you may avoid sin in whatever you do. And it will serve to equip you with patience that will enable you to endure the trials that you face. If you look at the verses that follow our text in this section of the Psalm you see how God's word lights your path and thus directs you:

- In your resolutions: V. 106: *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*
- In your afflictions: V. 107: *I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.*
- In your worship: V. 107: *Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.*
- In your joy: V. 111: *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*

Basically the word of God lights your path by drawing you to Christ himself where you become quickened – made alive to him, and where you find in him the source of your joy and strength. And then in fellowship with him he works in your heart the desires that pertain to the decisions of life. Probably the most succinct advise you can find in the matter of discerning God's will is found in Ps 37:4 *Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

If you're delighting in the Lord then you can gain confidence that your desires are coming from the Lord. This is much different than simply making independent decisions and then assuming that your decisions have the Lord's sanction and approval. No – your decisions spring from desires that fill your heart as you're drawn to Christ through his word and your heart is filled with his love and from that love you desire to worship and serve him and in connection with that service to him things come to your mind – directions that you can pursue, places that you can go, people that you can meet and get to know etc.

Dr. Cairns use to summarize it very well when he would counsel Christians that the way to know the will of God is to discern the way forward for you in your relationship to God. So by pursuing a certain course of study you will be advancing in your walk with Christ. And by marrying a certain man or woman you will be going forward in your walk with the Lord. And by pursuing a certain vocation that vocation will advance your relationship with Christ. And by relocating to another place to another city or another state or another country that relocation is perceived as the way forward in your walk with the Lord.

In this way the Lord provides a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. And we are thus enabled to do the will of God. This doesn't mean that the path of ease is necessarily the Lord's path. You may have opportunity to take on a higher paying job and the extra money you make may make a lot of things easier but if in taking such a job your walk with the Lord is hindered then that path of ease may really be the path of temptation.

So we see the implications of the text. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* The text implies that we need God's light and the text implies that our walk with the Lord is personal and intimate. There is yet another implication to the text:

III. We Must Keep Our Lamps Trimmed

And that's just another way of saying that we must keep in constant communion with Christ through his word and through prayer. We read from Mt. 25 earlier in the service for our Bible reading. The opening part of that chapter contains the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins. The wise virgins had oil for their lamps and were able to keep them burning – the foolish virgins did not. Matthew Henry says regarding this parable:

See the nature of Christianity. As Christians we profess to attend upon Christ, to honour him, also to be waiting for his coming. Sincere Christians are the wise virgins, and hypocrites the foolish ones... Many have a lamp of profession in their hands, but have not, in their hearts, sound knowledge and settled resolution, which are needed to carry them through the services and trials of the present state. Their hearts are not stored with holy dispositions, by the new-creating Spirit of God. Our light must shine before men in good works; but this is not likely to be long done, unless there is a fixed, active principle in the heart, of faith in Christ, and love to God and our brethren.

The foolish virgins were not ready for Christ's return. So may the application be drawn that if we don't keep our lamps burning through communion with Christ in his word and by his Spirit then we are not only not ready for his coming but you're not even ready to face the day.

How often do we launch into the day without the benefit of a lamp for our feet or light for our path? Remember the first point of this study. This world is a dark place. And there are forces that we face – *the rulers of the darkness of this world* Paul writes to the Ephesians.

If you would gain the benefit of a lamp for your feet and light for your path then you must so be in communion with Christ that his word provides that lamp and that light. What a healthy and beneficial emphasis this Psalm provides for us, then. Basically it's saying to us in each and every section – time in God's word – communion through God's word – guidance from God's word – obedience to God's word – light from God's word and by implication (and we know this in our experience) darkness and deadness and coldness and apathy apart from God's word.

I think it's good that we go through this Psalm section by section so that we may allow the Holy Spirit himself to keep hammering us with the truth that we must devote ourselves to the Bible. May the Holy Spirit conquer us with the truth of this Psalm. May he disturb our carelessness and neglect until we are devoted to Christ through his word for only then will we know the truth that *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*