

What Scripture Does

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Bible Verse: Psalm 119
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Well, our text this morning comes again from Psalm 119 as it did last week and, Lord willing, as it will next week as well. Last week we read the entire Psalm for our Scripture reading and this morning I just want to open not by reading the entire Psalm but just by reading the first eight verses of Psalm 119 to kind of pivot in our minds to this text and to focus on the blessing that it promises to those who abide by and give their minds over to the word of God. Verses 1 through 8 of Psalm 119 say this,

1 How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD. 2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart. 3 They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways. 4 You have ordained Your precepts, That we should keep them diligently. 5 Oh that my ways may be established To keep Your statutes! 6 Then I shall not be ashamed When I look upon all Your commandments. 7 I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments. 8 I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly!

Now last time we made the observations that Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm in the Bible and it is the longest chapter in the Bible, and so there is a unique emphasis given just as shown by the length of the Psalm, a unique emphasis given to the subject matter of this Psalm, and the subject matter of this Psalm is the Scripture, the word of God, the Bible, the law of God. So as we read through Scripture and as we read it cover to cover, this book very near the center of the entire Bible stands out to us and calls our attention to the supreme preeminence of the Bible in the life of faith.

And last time we covered what Scripture is, what its attributes are. We said that Scripture and looked at many of the verses in Psalm 119, we're treating it thematically, not verse by verse, we saw that Scripture is the word of God. When you open the Bible and when you read it, you are reading the very word of God. You are reading what God has intended man to know and what he guided through the process of inspiration, the writers of Scripture to record so that what you read is actually an expression of the very mind of the holy God, the Creator of the universe, and the Redeemer if you are a Christian, of your soul. It is the word of God and so it is entitled to our respect and our reverence, that we would pay attention to this word, that we would love it and respect it and to feel a sense

of its authority over us and also a sense of its blessing to us. It's the word of God. It is true. In other words, it tells us the way things really are. It is not like the world around us. It does not lie to us. It does not manipulate us. It tells us what is true and it is truth itself.

We said that it is faithful, that it is unchanging, and that it is a righteous word. And so Scripture has these wonderful attributes in its very essence, it contains these attributes and others as well, and because of what Scripture is, we respect it, we honor its authority. One of the reasons that we give prominence to the central part of every time we gather together is the word of God, the reason for that is because we respect Scripture. We understand that it is the word of God and so we want to give it the prominence in our worship, understanding that the proclamation of the word and hearing the word is an act of worship in and of itself. We reject that kind of unspoken assumption that the music is the worship part of the service and then you leave worship behind and you go into the preaching of the word of God. We don't accept that false dichotomy whatsoever. The preaching of the word of God, the hearing of the word of God, responding to the word of God is the central aspect of worship in a true Christian church and that's because of what Scripture is. It is the very word of God and the way that you honor God is that you let him speak and you hear what he has to say with reverence.

Now today we're pivoting into something different. Last time we saw what Scripture is, today we see what Scripture does. What Scripture does, and if you would turn back to the book of Hebrews 4 for just a moment, this kind of frames things in one place and then we're able to, as it were, the light hits a diamond or hits a prism, I should say, and the colors radiate out from it. In chapter 4, verse 12, we see the prism and then Psalm 119 is going to be the light that hits it and radiates out the things that the word of God does. Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." You see, the Bible is not a mere book that is external to us. It's not simply an external book that gives information to our minds. The Bible penetrates the human heart. The Bible is so alive and so vibrant as the Spirit of God brings it to our mind and applies it to our heart, that it has effects. It does things to us and what it does, you could say in summary form and then I'm going to break this down into five aspects of it, that for the believer the Bible shapes your heart as you go through life. The Bible shapes your heart as you go through life. It is a living book. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of your heart because it is true, the Bible, so to speak, personifying it, the Bible knows who you really are, the Bible has a way of ministering to your heart in the times of need, the Bible has a way of reproofing your sin when you fall into sin, correcting you, training you in righteousness. The Bible is a living book designed to apply to life and it does things to you in life and Psalm 119 brings that out for us. The word of God benefits the believer. It helps us. It is therefore our blessing. That's why Psalm 119 opens on that theme.

Go back to Psalm 119 now. Look at it there with me. We respect the Bible because it is the word of God, and we respect it because it brings blessing to us as well. Verses 1 through 2 again. I just want to emphasize this as we launch into our five points this morning. "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the

LORD. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart." You know, it's common for people to ask God to bless them, right? "Lord, bless me as I do this and that. Lord, bless my family. Lord, bless this, bless that," wanting God to give a favorable outcome to circumstances and to give us peace and encouragement as we walk through them. Everybody that prays somehow one or another is looking for God to bless them like that. Well, well and good, I suppose, but my friends, understand this, that the one who is earnest about truly seeking the true blessings of the true God understands that his blessings are dispensed and mediated through his word, the word written and the Word incarnate, and we need to close the gap of that dichotomy in our mind, wanting the lessening of God but viewing it as something distinct from Scripture. The one who truly wants the blessing of God will understand and see from Psalm 119 that his blessings are found in his word. "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD. Who seek His testimonies with all of their heart." And already we see that Scripture is plowing a dividing line here, and you and I, we should want to be on the right side of this line between the pretenders who only want the gifts that God gives, from the earnest sincere believer who wants the giver and let the gifts come and go as he sees fit, because God dispenses his blessings through his word and it's because Scripture does things in us, the Scriptures benefit us, and I'm going to show you five areas of life where Scripture benefits the heart of the believer as we walk with the word of God as we go through life.

So first of all, how does Scripture shape our hearts? Where does Scripture dispense its blessing to you as we see it thematically in Psalm 119? Well, point 1, you find the blessing in affliction. You find the blessing in affliction and if you've read Psalm 119 somewhat rapidly in the past, it's going to surprise you, as it did me as I was preparing, it's going to surprise you how prominent the theme of affliction is in Psalm 119. The writer of this Psalm is a leader of some kind who is under adversity. He is in affliction. He is feeling the weight of sorrow and trials, and yet even in that affliction comes forth out of his life from a human perspective, this magnificent poetic masterpiece that we know as Psalm 119, and I want to walk you through more than a dozen passages to show you this theme.

Look at Psalm 119:23 where he says, "Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes." There are powerful men of influence that are speaking and plotting against him and he says, "I'm setting that aside so that I can meditate on Your word, O God." Look at verse 50. He says, "This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me. The arrogant utterly deride me, Yet I do not turn aside from Your law." Verse 61, "The cords of the wicked have encircled me, But I have not forgotten Your law." Verse 78, "May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; But I shall meditate on Your precepts." Verses 85 and 86, "The arrogant have dug pits for me, Men who are not in accord with Your law. All Your commandments are faithful; They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!" It goes on, we're not even halfway done yet on this theme. Psalm 119:95, "The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I shall diligently consider Your testimonies." Verse 110, "The wicked have laid a snare for me, Yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts." Verse 134, I realize we're looking at these quickly. The idea is for you to see the abundance of

references here to understand the prominence of the theme of affliction in Psalm 119. Verse 134, "Redeem me from the oppression of man, That I may keep Your precepts." Verse 139, "My zeal has consumed me, Because my adversaries have forgotten Your words." Verse 143, "Trouble and anguish have come upon me, Yet Your commandments are my delight." Verse 153, "Look upon my affliction and rescue me, For I do not forget Your law." Verse 157, "Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, Yet I do not turn aside from Your testimonies." And finally in verse 161, "Princes persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your words."

July 4, a day on which I'm preaching this message, is somewhat a political day, you might say. It's obviously a time when country is often in the forefront of our thinking and I just want to make a really important point here that I think a lot of you need to hear. We see the moral collapse of the society all around us, and the temptation for many who are not well grounded in the word of God is to immediately want to run to political solutions for what they perceive to be political problems. Understand that from Psalm 119, there are people that are in great authority who are afflicting him, having conspiracies against the writer of this Psalm, working against him, and they are in powerful positions with all of their ability to bring their human might upon him for his harm. His response, beloved, his response to that is not one of counteracting the political movement. His response is not one of political intrigue or legislative response. His response over a dozen times in this, maybe approaching 20, I didn't exactly count them, I have it right in front of me, but his response is to turn in trust to the living word of God. That is his response to the political intrigue and the adversity that he is facing from his oppressors. He doesn't respond with his own schemes. He doesn't respond with his own human means. He turns to the word of God, meditates on it and – watch this – the affliction becomes the cause of him renewing his commitment to God's word even deeper. Now look, that is not the general response of Christianity today, the magazine and the church itself. This is a call, the adversity, the affliction is designed to drive us to the word of God, not to worry, not to human resolutions of the problem.

Now with that little tangent aside, let's draw some other things out about this aspect of affliction here. Beloved, this may come as a surprise for a few of you, Scripture does not promise that the believer will never face trouble. Far to the contrary, it tells us that it is through many afflictions that we must enter the kingdom of God. We must, you and I, we must condition our minds, we must come to the understanding that as we walk through this life there are going to be a multitude of various kinds of affliction that trouble us, that beset us, that make life difficult for us as we go through this pilgrim journey, and we need to understand that that's the way that it's going to be. The promise of Christ is not to keep you out of that trouble, but rather the promise is that Christ will sustain you in it and that the word of God is a living word that can give you strength and comfort in the middle of it so that your expectations are going to frame the way that you view things. If you think that you're not supposed to go through trials as a Christian, you're either going to think that God is treating you unfairly or that, you know, I must have done something wrong to be in the midst of this affliction, when that's just not the case. This is the nature of living life in a fallen world. Job 5:7 says that man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward. Affliction of the believing people is a common theme in Scripture and where

we're to come to that is not to collapse under the weight of it, not to be frustrated in the midst of it, but to let this affliction remind us of the theme of Psalm 23, "I fear no evil for You are with me. I fear no evil for You are with me. The evil is all about me and the enemies are watching me as You prepare a table before me in the midst of them, but You are with me and therefore that is enough. That is enough to sustain me, to sustain me in joy, in confidence, in faith as I walk through these afflictions." And that's what you see, the psalmist's perspective coming out as he writes about these afflictions in Psalm 119.

With all of that affliction that we looked at, some 20 passages, give or take, in Psalm 119, what is the perspective of the psalmist on all of that adversity that he was facing? Do you know what his answer to it is? In humility he acknowledges that the affliction brings spiritual benefit to him. The affliction has spiritual benefits for him. This is remarkable. Psalm 119 for all of its themes of affliction, is not written from a downcast frame of mind. Psalm 119, rather speaks in these terms. Look at verse 67, Psalm 119:67 where he says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word." Affliction taught me to put aside my unfaithful ways and to abide more closely with Christ. Affliction taught me to stop treating sin as such a casual matter and to get serious about sanctification, you might say. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word." In other words, he's saying there was a benefit to this affliction that I walked through. It produced a more sanctified life in my heart. Verse 71, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes." Verse 75, "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, According to Your word to Your servant." Then in verse 92, "If Your law had not been my delight, Then I would have perished in my affliction."

What does Scripture do? One of the things that Scripture does is that it instructs you in the midst of your affliction if you will take the time to open it and read it, if you will take the time to hear it taught, if you will take the time to submit your heart and mind to it. Scripture teaches you as a Christian that there is benefit to affliction. It sanctifies you. God uses it to sanctify you. God in the affliction is being faithful to you even though it hurts, and that in the end God brings you out and comforts you in the affliction and comforts you through his word.

So what does Psalm 119 teach us, what Scripture does in the midst of affliction? It teaches you, beloved, that when you say, "I'm feeling the weight and sting of change and affliction," it should cause you to say, "Ah, what that means is that I need to go to the word more deeply. I need to renew my commitment to the word, not get discouraged but just go to the word of God." And so I ask you, I ask you as a pastor, as your pastor for many of you, where do you really turn when affliction hits? When the temperature of affliction goes up, does your attention to God's word go up or is there an inverse relationship there? We need to take these things seriously. Responding to the word of God and receiving the word of God in your affliction is the key to allowing Scripture to do its work to comfort you and to sustain you in it. So it immediately challenges us at the most difficult points of life to consider what do we think about Scripture, if it is the word of God and it does comfort us in affliction, then wouldn't it make sense to be expecting you to be particularly in the word of God when affliction hits rather than turning to

alcohol, rather than turning to worldly amusements, rather than turning to any other matter of earthly worldly comfort or sinful means of coping with things? Isn't that obvious that if the word of God is what it is and you are who you say you are, then it would seem that you would be in the word of God particularly as your trust and as your refuge for your soul as you're going through these difficult trials.

So Scripture shapes our heart in affliction. It shapes our hearts in another way, point 2, it shapes our hearts for understanding. For understanding. As you read Psalm 119, you're struck by the fact that, first of all, the psalmist loves the word of God, right? I mean, this is just obvious and we'll talk about this more next week, but he loves the word of God. It is the object of his highest affection. And because – listen, watch this, these things are linked together, this is connected together – because he loves the word of God, he wants to understand the word of God and he asks God to help him understand it better. There is a prayerful devotion to the word that is not simply looking for it to solve our problems or give us strength, there's this prayerful devotion seeking to have a deep comprehension of it.

Psalm 119:12. This might seem repetitive as we go through it but, beloved, understand that the multiple references are giving us emphasis. It is calling our attention to how important this is, and I'm sure that this is going to convict each one of us as we contemplate it and realize how generally prayerless we are about asking God to illuminate our minds so that we could understand Scripture better, and making the word and understanding it an object of great priority in our prayer lives. Psalm 119:12, "Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." Verse 18, "Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law." Verse 26, "I have told of my ways, and You have answered me; Teach me Your statutes." Verse 33, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all my heart." You see, this is somebody who doesn't simply want a greater theological attainment alone, he wants to understand the word better so that he could practice it better in his life. It's not simply mental gymnastics that he's engaging in as so much scholarly literature seems to be in the Christian world, at least at times. He wants it so that it will affect his life, it will conform him to obedience. That's what he's asking for. "God, I want to walk in the path of Your commandments. I delight in them therefore teach me. Teach me. I come to You and I ask the Spirit of God to be my instructor as I pursue the word of God."

Verse 38, "Establish Your word to Your servant, As that which produces reverence for You." Verse 64, "The earth is full of Your lovingkindness, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." Verse 68, "You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes." Verse 73, "Your hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments." Put verses 68 and 73 together. He honors God for his attributes. He recognizes that he is a creature made by the hands of this same God, and in recognition of the goodness of God, in recognition of God's role as Creator in his life, he says, "Teach me. Teach me Your word. Teach me through Your word who You are. Teach me who I am so that I might be able to walk in Your commandments." Scripture leads us, it compels us to this kind of worldview.

Psalm 119:108. We're looking at the fact that Scripture shapes our hearts for understanding. In 108, "O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, And teach me Your ordinances." My favorite inverse 125. It's foolish to talk about favorite things as if you're competing the word of God with one another, but this one has just been so familiar from the very beginning of my Christian life that it just stands out to me. Psalm 119:125, "I am Your servant; give me understanding, That I may know Your testimonies." Verse 130, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." As the word is taught to me, O God, as it is explained, it gives understanding, understand that is available even to the simple, even to the uneducated. It does not require advanced degrees in theology and biblical studies in order to understand the word of God. The humblest of believers across the world throughout the centuries have been able to know and have a profound depth of the understanding of God and the gospel and the way that it applies. They have profound understanding because this word is their meditation and the Spirit of God is their teacher.

So it gives understanding to the simple. It's not that we're opposed to scholarship. Scholarship is great. The key thing to understand is that the word of God is not simply available to the scholars who study it. A lot of times the word of God is hidden from them because they're approaching it with a heart of pride and arrogance instead. And so the simple humble believer has in the word of God that which can give him understanding, and so you ask for it, you pray to God for it.

Verse 135, "Make Your face shine upon Your servant, And teach me Your statutes." Verse 144, "Your testimonies are righteous forever; Give me understanding that I may live." And finally verse 169, "Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word." You can't miss it. You can't miss it. What the psalmist is doing in theological terms is this, he is confessing his need for illumination. He needs the help of God to expand the capacity of his mind to understand its depths and expanding his mind to understand the application of it to his life.

And look, there is a very real sense in which the Bible is a closed and locked book to the unbeliever. The one whose heart is hard, the one whose heart is not receptive cannot understand this book. It is a spiritual book. In 1 Corinthians 2 it says that the natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit. He's not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned, and that's part of the reason we respect this word, we realize that this isn't available to everybody. This is available only to those that have been born again. This is only available to those who are earnestly teachable under the instruction of the word. I mean, you can open it and you can read it but there won't be understanding. This is a supernatural book. It is a supernatural book because it comes from a supernatural God, and as a result of that, you need supernatural help in order to be able to understand it. So you ask for it. You depend on God. You express your dependence.

The funny thing is, the more you study it, the more you realize how much there is that you don't understand, how much that you haven't explored. You realize how shallow your understanding is even as you've studied it for years. I have a friend who has compared the

word of God to drinking salty water, the more you drink, the more you thirst for it. So Scripture as you're reading Scripture, as you're encountering things hard to understand, as you're seeing glimmers of light and wanting more, Scripture stimulates that desire for understanding and you see that expressed in Psalm 119 by the repeated prayers of the psalmist, "God, teach me. God, help me. God, give me understanding."

And again, beloved, once again we see Psalm 119, we see the word of God plowing the field of our hearts and turning it over to the light and to being exposed to things. In affliction, where do we turn? As we have the word of God in our hands, how eager, how desperate, how hungry, how thirsty are we for the righteousness that the word gives to us? It's the mark of a true believer to have that somewhere in your heart, and I say this with sympathy, with sadness, with, you know, with kindness in my heart and I just know that there are some of you that really really need to hear this. Those of you that your life pattern is just to neglect the word of God and that's your ongoing life pattern. Oh, you show up on Sunday but the word of God for yourself is really something kind of foreign to your life, your mind, your aspirations, your affections. Friends, you really need to take stock of where you are spiritually. It's possible that you're not born again if you can just go through life without any regard for this word. That's very very possible if not likely because one of the things that the Spirit of God puts in the heart of a believer when he gives the new birth to a believer, is the Spirit of God puts in the believing heart a desire for the word of God which the Spirit of God produced. The Spirit of God works in harmony with the purposes of God. The Spirit of God gave us this book and therefore when he saves someone, isn't it obvious that he's going to want to take that person that he has saved and connect them to the word of God? Isn't that obvious? Isn't it obvious from Psalm 119 that the believing heart is consumed with a desire to understand the Scriptures?

And so what are we to think, what are we to say about the one who is coldly indifferent to the word of God? You know, don't take comfort in the fact that you're in this room once or twice a week. Examine yourselves to see where you stand in relationship to the word of God because that is a reliable thermometer, a barometer of where you are really at spiritually. These are serious matters, beloved. When Jesus says, "Depart from Me," he'll say, "you who practice lawlessness. You lived your life apart from the law of God. You had no desire for it. You weren't earnest in it. Depart from Me. I never knew you. On what basis do you claim a part in My kingdom if you had no interest in the kingdom book during your course of life? What makes you think you're part of the kingdom?"

So we're humbled before the word. Now thirdly, Scripture shapes our heart in affliction, it shapes our heart for understanding, thirdly, it shapes our hearts for obedience. It shapes our hearts for obedience. God is the ultimate and final authority in the universe. The word, therefore what he speaks carries inherent authority. The word of God has moral authority. It comes from a sovereign God.

Look at Psalm 119:4. Scripture is not simply a comfort to us, Scripture is the law to us. Scripture is authority. It is the embodiment of the authority of God expressed to us. So Psalm 119:4 says this, "You have ordained Your precepts, That we should keep them

diligently." Scripture exists to be obeyed, is one way that you could look at it, and throughout the Psalm, Psalm 119, the psalmist is expressing his desire to obey the word. He doesn't want to simply know it in a mental sense, he wants his life to conform to the precepts and statutes of God and you see this throughout. Look at verse 9, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." Do you see the connection? The affections of his heart for the word of God are tied to life obedience, faith-based life obedience to the word of God. It's not separate. Scripture formed in him a desire to obey and so he repeatedly asks for help to that end.

Look at verse 17, "Deal bountifully with Your servant, That I may live and keep Your word." Verse 33, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all my heart." Verse 88, "Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth." And in verse 133 he says, "Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me." He desires not only to be comforted in his affliction, he desires not only to understand the word of God, his desires are followed through to obedience, to repentance, from turning away from sin and evil, turning away from indifference to the word of God and the people of God, turning away from all of that so that he might be found as one who keeps his commandments.

And understand this, beloved, I'm describing it there from a human perspective of the psalmist's conscious desires as he's writing this Psalm and as we're processing it in our own hearts, but understand that we're reading the word of God. Psalm 119 itself is the word of God and so God is telling us through this the way that he wants his people to be, what it is that he is calling us to, what it is that a life of discipleship looks like. It looks like this, it looks like trusting God in affliction. It looks like desiring to understand the word of God. It looks like a life of obedience. Affliction has its purposes and our mind has purposes for understanding, and we exist to obey. This is what discipleship looks like and it's far more than just simply going through a prepackaged set of materials that you go through for a period of time and then you move on to other things in life. No, the discipleship that Psalm 119 is showing us, this is full-orbed life throughout every day, being oriented in this way, and the word of God is our center of gravity in it all.

So when we see these prayers of God, "Help me to obey," you see his prayers and his desires for obedience, it gives you perspective on the way that he expresses his commitment to obedience elsewhere in the Psalm. Look at verse 8 again with me, Psalm 119:8. Look at the conviction. Look at the commitment that he's expressing here in response to the word of God. He says, "I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly!" Verse 32, "I shall run the way of Your commandments, For You will enlarge my heart." Verse 55, "O LORD, I remember Your name in the night, And keep Your law. This has become mine, That I observe Your precepts." Verse 60, "I hastened and did not delay To keep Your commandments." Verses 87 and 88, "They almost destroyed me on earth, But as for me, I did not forsake Your precepts. Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth." Verse 101, "I have

restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word." Verse 115, "Depart from me, evildoers, That I may observe the commandments of my God." Verse 120, "My flesh trembles for fear of You, And I am afraid of Your judgments." And finally verse 167 and 168, "My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You."

"All of my thoughts, all of my life, God, are before You, therefore I want all of my life to be lived in obedience." We'll see that he's not claiming perfection as he says that but there is this spirit of humble faith that pervades the Psalm and the spirit of conviction that says, "When I understand," this should be the mark of every believing heart, "my commitment," you say to yourself, "my commitment is that when I understand Scripture and the way that it applies to a particular aspect of my character or circumstances that I'm facing, my commitment is toward obedience." I get so tired of people who want to equivocate and keep their options open. Are you going to obey God's word? "Maybe." Are you going to do what's right here? "Maybe." What do you mean, maybe? How can the answer to that question be anything other than, "Yes, of course I'm going to obey. God's word is authority. I love it. I want my life to conform to it. And so, yes, I'm going to obey. Just give me understanding so that I can do that." You see, and as you study Psalm 119 and as you read through it, it squeezes out of you that carnal desire to keep your options open. "Maybe I'll obey in the future, maybe I won't. You know, I just want, I'll judge that when I get there." It doesn't work that way. That's not the Christian life. That's not the Christian conviction. The Christian conviction is, "I will obey and when I fall short of that commitment, it grieves me and it's unacceptable and I'm led to repentance when I do."

You see, true understanding of God's word leads to obedience and, my friend, I say it gently but I say it truly, the person who is indifferent to his obedience to Scripture does not understand the Bible at all because understanding is given to us so that we would obey what we know. Understanding is given to us so that we would desire more understanding and grow better in obedience but there is never meant to be a distinction between the understanding in your mind and in your heart and the obedience that your hands and feet produce. It is meant to impact your life. And listen, another aspect that it does, is it does this, a commitment to Scripture, genuine Christian living develops such convictions of truth in your mind that you reject ungodly philosophies, you reject worldly thinking. You don't try to have it both ways. The Christian is someone who has left the world behind. The Christian is someone who has said, "I was in that realm and now I reject it. I leave it behind for the realm of God, the realm of God's word, the realm of the Spirit." And you cannot be double-minded and have it both ways. James rebukes the double-minded in chapter 1 of his text. "Don't let that man expect a blessing from God. He's a double-minded man, unstable in all of his ways."

So we don't flirt with people who are not our spouse and we don't flirt in a spiritual way with the adulterous spirit of the world around us. We need to know the word of God. We need to turn to the word of God. We need to be faithful to the word of God. That's the only proper response for the Son of God to give to the word of God. It can't be any other way. It can't be any other way and if you're trying to have it both ways, I plead with you,

I plead with you to take these things earnestly and go alone with God and sort these things out with an open Bible in front of you. This should be searching us. What am I living for? Who are my friends? Who influences me? What's playing in my house during the time of, you know, that I'm awake? What's my intake? If it's just Fox News, beloved, oh, spiritually that's bad news if Fox News is the primary source of the way that you're seeing, understanding and responding to the world. Be a lot of conservative Republicans in hell. Be a lot of liberal Democrats in hell too, just to balance it out. On July 4, we might as well be fair to every side, right?

So Scripture shapes our hearts in affliction, it shapes it for understanding, and it shapes it for obedience, now fourthly, it shapes us for repentance. It shapes us for repentance. We'll try to treat this a little more quickly. You know, the older I get, the slower I go. That's okay.

Point 4: it's for repentance. The psalmist's love of the word of God is not an assertion of self-righteousness. This focus on obedience that he has given is not an assertion that he has attained a merit of his own or that he's arrived. It's not like that at all. It reminds me of what Paul said in Philippians 3, "Not that I've already attained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I might attain to the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." This reminds me of that.

Look at Psalm 119:20. The word of God shapes us for repentance and look at verse 20, he says, "My soul is crushed with longing After Your ordinances at all times." I long for it. I hunger for it and I'm crushed that I fall short of what your word requires. Verse 59, "I considered my ways And turned my feet to Your testimonies." I looked at my ways, I realized where I fell short, and I turned my life toward your word. Repentance is a turning away from something toward something else, a turning from sin and toward Christ as he is revealed in the word. Verse 101, "I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word." Verse 120, which I jumped ahead to last time. You get a double emphasis on it here today. No extra charge. No extra charge. "My flesh trembles for fear of You, And I am afraid of Your judgments." Verse 123, "My eyes fail with longing for Your salvation And for Your righteous word." Verse 133, "Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me." Verse 136, "My eyes shed streams of water, Because they do not keep Your law." And the very last verse, verse 176, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments."

This Psalm ends on a call for God to seek him like a shepherd seeking a lost sheep. "I have wandered away. Find me. I haven't forgotten Your word but I've stumbled into sin. Find me." And he says, "I've strayed," and he says, "God, restore me to the flock. Restore me to Your fold. Conform my heart and help me to repent," is what he is saying. And beloved, there's just so much bad teaching, so much false teachings that the word of God addresses so clearly. Understand that the initial act of repentance at the moment of your conversion, understand that that initial act of conversion gives birth to a lifetime of repentance. It gives birth to a lifetime of repentance. Do you know how you know that's true? You never stop repenting in true Christian living. You never stop repenting because

you never completely stop sinning. We all stumble in many ways and therefore repentance is an expected ongoing part of the genuine biblical Christian life, and those people who tell you that you don't need to worry about the 10 Commandments because they have nothing to do with you, those people who model a lifestyle of being in ministry, disqualifying themselves morally and then jumping right back in it, they're conditioning people to think that repentance is no big deal, that sin is actually not an important aspect to be put to death in your Christian life. That's all lethal. It's all poison. I have a former classmate who is the subject of a high profile lawsuit because he committed adultery with the wife of a husband and wife couple that he was counseling. This is awful and his theology had tempted people and told people, the effect of it was don't be that worried about sanctification. Everything is covered by grace. Well, do you know what grace does? What grace does is grace inspires you to obedience. Grace gives you a heart that wants to obey. Grace gives you a heart that grieves when you sin. It's not a license to disobey. Real grace, true grace transforms your heart into one that wants obedience, and when you fall short you repent. You don't boast in it. You don't continue in it. These are matters of highest and most basic fundamental priority.

Scripture shapes you for repentance, shapes you for affliction, for understanding and for obedience, finally, point number 5 here, I've saved the best for last in some ways, saved the cherry on top of the dessert, Scripture shapes you for joy. It shapes you for joy. This whole matter that we've gone through this morning, how Scripture leads us through affliction and obedience and understanding and repentance, this is not a grim-faced, sorrowful, morbid way to approach life. This is the life of joy. This is the life of contentment in the deepest part of the inner man and the psalmist makes that plain as well.

Go back to verse 14. Psalm 119:14. Earnest repentance is accompanied by a deep joy. Verse 14, "I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches." Verse 16, "I shall delight in Your statutes." Verse 24, "Your testimonies also are my delight." Verse 35, "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it." Verse 47, "I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love." Verse 111, "I have inherited Your testimonies forever, For they are the joy of my heart." Verse 162, "I rejoice at Your word, As one who finds great spoil." Verse 174, "I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight."

Scripture comes to you today and asks you this basic fundamental question: is God's word a joy to you? Do you love it? Do you delight in it? Is understanding sweet to you? Do you have time for it because you love it so much? It doesn't do any good to say, "But I'm not a reader." For a Christian to say, "I'm not a reader therefore I'm not interested in the word of God," is like a living human being saying, "I'm not an eater. I don't eat. I'm just not interested in it." Something's wrong there. Something is seriously profoundly wrong there because true salvation produces a joy in Christ, the Word incarnate. We rejoice in Christ because we see his love, we see his imminent worth, we see his glorious essence, and we realize that when he went to the cross he died for us, he died for our sins, he died for my sins, and we love him in response to that. Well, genuine understanding of biblical salvation understands that Christ who is the Word incarnate is the source of the

word written. And so there is a marriage of love for Christ with the written word of God. The word written reveals the Word incarnate. The Word incarnate gave his blessing and stamp of authority to the written word. They are interdependent. You can't separate the two.

So what do we do in light of all of these things, Scripture forms us for affliction, and Scripture forms us for understanding, and obedience, and repentance, and joy? What do we do? Well, what we do is we come to this word in humility and we do this, we rely on it. We trust it. We rely on this word in our afflictions. We rely on the written word of God for understanding. We rely on the word of God for obedience and for repentance. And we rely on it for our deepest joy. Men and women, husbands and wives, children, they're all going to come and go. Friends come and go, health comes and goes, finances come and go, whatever it is about earthly life, it comes and it goes, and so we never repose our final hope and aspiration in such passing things. Even though we love our families, they're not the ultimate source of our joy because we understand that eventually one way or another we're going to part in the end. The word of God, it abides forever and therefore it becomes a source of our joy.

My dear friend, do you know Scripture like we've discussed here today from Psalm 119? Do you know it as a source in affliction? Do you desire to understand it? Do you desire to obey it? Do you repent when you don't? Do you find joy in the word of God? Do you know Scripture like that? That's the question. And with those thoughts echoing in our mind, bow with me in prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your precious word. I pray for those, Father, who perhaps have been awakened to their dead spiritual state and pray that Your Spirit would give them new life in Christ that would be subsequently shown to be true by a living response to Your living word. Father, this convicts in one way or another, it convicts all of us. It convicts me. And so with Peter we pray, Lord, You know all things, You know that we love You, You know that we love Your word even though we fall short in these many ways but, Father, Your word is our joy, it is our delight, it is our aspiration. We do ask You to help us understand it better and as You're giving us understanding to know it better, Father, give us a simultaneous illumination to understand the true state of our souls. Give great assurance to the genuine believers, Father, those who are like I once was, a false convert falsely claiming Christ, a false Christian, Father, convict them and open their eyes that they may behold wonderful things from Your law. And for those who know they're not Christians, Father, may these words from Psalm 119 give them a hunger and a desire that You feed and lead until it ultimately leads them to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who made a sacrifice for sinners just like them. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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