

James Shepherd

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[0 : 0 0] My name is James, the student minister here at St. Paul's. Welcome to you. If you're a guest of us here this morning, look forward to catching you after this service. Before we start, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you so much that in your word you reveal to us the way of salvation and how we ought to live now as we look forward to eternity. We pray, Lord, as we hear it this morning, that you would speak to us, that we would have our hearts and our minds and our ears open to what you have to say and that we would leave here changed, encouraged, rebuked, and that we would leave here desiring to follow you always.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. We live and exist in the world that constantly demands our attention. Wherever we go, we are bombarded by billboards, advertising everywhere, posters, TV commercials, radio commercials, advertising on the web.

We can't go anywhere without the world wanting our attention, trying to sell us something, trying to inform us of something that we should be taking or listening to. But the world demands more than just our attention.

The world demands our love. The world demands our affection. And this can be particularly seen in the advertising industry. Companies work with advertisers to sell their product, not merely to just give us what we need, but to help us love their products.

[1 : 2 6] Companies want our affection. And their strategy totally works. I mean, how many times have you heard your friends say or yourself say these things? Look at my new iPhone.

Isn't it beautiful? I love it. Oh, I love my new car. It's so cute. I named it this or that. How many people have you named your car? Who names their cars?

Yeah, guilty, guilty. See, you fall into their strategy. Look at how beautiful these plants are. Oh, I love them. I love how they look in the garden. I can't wait to see them blossom. Oh, my goodness, these shorts, they're so cute.

I love them. I'm not going to buy them, no matter how expensive they are. Do you notice something here? All these things that captivate our affection are inanimate objects.

They don't return the affection at all. And we attribute human traits to otherwise things that cannot love us in return.

[2 : 2 4] And this is no accident. This is exactly what advertisers and companies want. They want to make their products more than just the necessities of life. They want to make us love them.

They want us to make these products the objects of our affection. And you see, advertisers have not come across this by accident. It's not something they've stumbled across.

They have tapped into something that is very fundamental to our humanity, which is this, our innate desire to love and worship something.

Companies have used this and exploited it in order to make us love and desire their products, which is why we apply human qualities and traits to things that are otherwise inanimate.

The world is constantly vying for our attention, promising to be everything we hope and dreamed of, tapping into our innate desire to worship and to love something, and demanding that it be the owner of our affection.

[3 : 28] And as Christians, it can be tremendously hard to keep our attention and our affection on Christ and offer Him our affection alone. In a world demanding it so much and promising so much in return, it can be very hard to stay focused on the Word.

And that is why passages such as Psalm 119 are very helpful for us. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Book of Psalms, but also the longest chapter in the whole Bible.

And it's a psalm entirely dedicated to and devoted to the subject of God's Word, expressing the psalmist's delight and joy, affection for the Word of God.

And it works similar to the way of advertising. As the psalmist expresses his own delight and joy in God's Word, he calls his readers, us here this morning, to have the same joy, to have the same delight, to have the same affection for the Word of God.

The psalmist is full of praise for his Word. Listen to some examples here. Verse 20, My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.

[4 : 36] Verse 30, I have chosen the way of faithfulness. I have set my heart on your laws. Verse 43, Never take your word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.

Verse 47, For I delight in your commands because I love them. Verse 81, My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word.

Verse 92, If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them ye have preserved my life.

Verse 97, Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long. Verse 119, All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross, Therefore I love your statutes.

My flesh trembles in fear of you. I stand in awe of your laws. Verse 129, Your statutes are wonderful. Therefore I obey them.

[5 : 36] Can you hear the psalmist's delight and affection he has for God's word? His laws, his decrees, statutes, promises, and rules. He is totally enamored by the word of God.

It's the owner of his affection. This psalm is a celebration of God's gracious revelation to us in his word. And so as the psalmist writes of his own affection and love for the word, he wants to remind us who follow and love God, that the true object of our affection should be the word and nothing else.

In a world that would demand otherwise, the psalmist wants to redirect our attention and our affection from temporary, worthless things in this world to the eternal, invaluable, incomprehensible, sometimes word of God.

The word that leads us into the presence and knowledge of God himself. His love and affection and adoration for the word is only surpassed by his own love for God himself.

You see, his affection for the word is fueled by the fact that it's the word of God that allows him into the presence of God. And that is why the word of God is the proper and rightful owner of his affection.

[6 : 59] There are two big things that come out of this psalm that remind us of why the word of God ought to be the owner of our affection and above all else.

Firstly, because his word, or by his word, we receive salvation. Now if you note back to some of the examples before, much of the psalmist's affection for the word of God stems from its role in salvation.

The psalmist puts his hope in the word of God for salvation. He says without it, he would have perished in his affliction. In verse 81, the psalmist is longing for salvation.

He feels death is at his door, but he draws comfort from the word of God and looks forward to the salvation that is promised in his word.

Now it's really important to realize here that the psalmist and his knowledge of salvation does not come from the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or any document in the New Testament. The psalmist has in mind here the books of the law, the Torah, and the prophets.

[8 : 01] Books like Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and the minor prophets. He writes with these books in mind. With these books in mind, he talks about how God is his salvation, how the word is the means of salvation.

Many of us here as Christians struggle at times to read the Old Testament, what the psalmist calls the law. And in fact, why would we read the Old Testament? Aren't we all about the New Testament these days?

Aren't we all about the gospels? Why on earth would we read something called the Old Testament, and we have what's called the New Testament? We might feel that way about the law, but the psalmist certainly does not.

Whilst we might see it as something that's too hard to understand or comprehend, not relevant for us here today as Christians, the psalmist sees the whole law, every single word written in it, every word God has spoken in it, as necessary for salvation.

And the thing is, the New Testament also agrees with that. In Paul's second letter, Timothy says this in chapter 3, The sacred writings Paul mentions here are not the gospels.

[9 : 39] They are the books of the law and the prophets. The same writings our psalmist 119 refers to. Paul doesn't tell Timothy to forget what he grew up learning and just focus on the gospels themselves.

But contrary to that, he says to remember them. For by them he learnt about a God who was holy, a God who was faithful to his people, a God who had promises to save them.

And in those things that he learnt, he grew in his knowledge of his salvation that would come through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul did not see the law of God as something that is no longer required, but something that is integral for knowing and understanding where salvation comes from.

In the story of the travels of Emmaus Road, we see how the law and the prophets was necessary for the people who Jesus travelled with in understanding their salvation as well.

Notice that their eyes were kept from seeing that it was Jesus until Jesus interpreted Moses, okay, the law, and the prophets and everything in scripture concerning himself.

[10 : 51] It wasn't until Jesus explained from all of scripture that these men understood where salvation had come from. It was the opening and the explaining of God's word from beginning to end that caused their hearts to burn with joy, with excitement within them.

And at that point, when they realised who this man was, that it was him who the scriptures had talked about, that it was Jesus, the one who had come to save them. Our view of the Old Testament may be that it's boring, hard to understand, and irrelevant for us.

But to the psalmist and to the authors of the New Testament, it is key to understanding our salvation. Indeed, it's more than just key to understanding our salvation, but its entire purpose, from Genesis to Revelation, is to help us understand and make us wise for our salvation.

Dare I say it, the four gospels on their own are not enough to help us to understand our salvation. If they were, then the whole counsel of God would only be those four gospels.

But what we have here in the word here is always and completely necessary for our salvation. Even the hard bits. When we see God's word, all of it, with the purpose of making us wise for our salvation, will not our affection and love for it grow?

[12 : 23] Will not our desire to read it grow? Will not we be continually thankful to God and worship Him for His gracious revelation to us?

We struggle to read Scripture because we easily forget what its purpose is. we get too bogged down by how difficult it can be to understand it and then too easily distracted by worldly things that promise to be so much more a supplement form of our salvation.

But this is why we have Psalm 119. This is why the psalmist spends 176 verses talking about his affection for God, that we might not lose sight of its purpose, that it makes us wise for our salvation.

All of God's word is worthy of our affection and indeed, it is the rightful owner of our affection above all else because it is the only thing in our life that can save us.

The word of God deserves our affection above all the things because it leads us and guides us to the greatest treasure we will ever have in life, the one who saves. The psalmist shows his affection for God's word because it's the very thing that saves.

[13 : 48] But his worship of God for his word extends beyond that. For the psalmist, he sees that it's worthy of his affection not because it just saves him for eternity, but also because it helps him to persevere in this life now.

And that's the second big thing we see in this psalm and particularly in this passage. Here in our passage, the psalmist prays that he would keep God's word, that he would receive understanding, that he would observe it for his whole heart, that it would keep him from leading a life of selfish gain, that it would keep him from leading a life looking at worthless things in order that he might have life in the ways of God according to his word.

He doesn't see disobedience to God's word as only an obligation, but the very means of his perseverance. The psalmist throughout repeatedly credits God's word, specifically his law and statutes, as the very means that sustain him and help him to persevere in life.

Verse 54, your statutes have been my songs in the house of my soul journey. I remember your name in the night, O Lord, and keep your Lord. The blessing, this blessing has fallen to me that I have kept your precepts.

In verse 92 again, if your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts for by them you have preserved my life.

[15 : 25] The psalmist is very affectionate about God's law because of how he sees it help him to persevere and sustain him through the tough times.

Its purpose, other than pointing towards our salvation in Jesus, is to provide a helpful corrective, to help us keep our lives on track, that we might live lives well in a world that is otherwise corrupt and broken.

The law and the prophets are gifts of God's grace for our salvation and for our perseverance in this life right now.

They are not a burden for us to try and avoid, but they are also not the means of our salvation. It points to where our salvation comes from in Jesus and helps us to persevere in this life knowing full well that we are under grace, looking forward to enjoying the fullness of our salvation to come.

The whole counsel of God's word, the Old and New Testament, ultimately exists for our benefit. The way of salvation might be made known to us and we might have a helpful guide throughout our life to help us persevere during the tough times.

[16 : 48] This is why the psalmist is so captivated and so affectionate about God's word. He sees the eternal value of what God is trying to achieve through his word.

He sees that God's word is his gracious self-revelation for us, for our benefit. He sees that by God's word we can enjoy a relationship with him.

For the psalmist it is something, his word, that he falls back on no matter how dark and horrible life can be, no matter how much pain or suffering he might endure, no matter how scared and hopeless and fearful he is, he can trust in the all-powerful word of God.

Know that it's sufficient and true. Know that it will never fail or fade away. And this is why the psalmist urges us to make God's word the object of our affection.

And yet, we find ourselves too easily pleased by other things. we find our affection is too easily won by worldly things.

[17 : 55] The latest TV shows, work, study, sleeping in, gardening, holidaying, clothes, cars. These things, the psalmist would say, if they steal our affection away from God's word, are worthless things.

The world wants our attention, the world wants our affection, and it's a battle to keep God's word as the object of our affection, the center of our life.

And no doubt, the psalmist realizes this, which is why he prays, incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things.

He knows the struggle that we have in life, and he himself prays that he would continue to always keep God's word at the center. What the world has to offer can look so enticing and so beautiful at times, and it can make God's word seem bland and boring and too hard, which is why, again, the psalmist prays, turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good.

He wants us to know, and he wants himself to always know that no matter how hard it can be to obey God's word, no matter how hard it can be to read God's word, it is always good because God himself is good.

[19 : 17] In a world constantly fighting for our affection, challenging us to make material and temporary things the object of our affection, Psalm 119 comes to our aid to remind us of the eternal and beautiful word of God that makes known the way of salvation and the very instrument of our perseverance in this life, that all the things that would have our affection are insufficient since they cannot provide us what we need, nor a relationship with the one who the word reveals.

The question is, is it the object of your affection? Is the word of God the object and the owner of your affection?

I know this is difficult to answer. I'm at Bible college and the irony is that I've never found it harder in my life to love God's word except for the last two years.

It has been really hard to make God's word at the centre of my life and the owner of my affection. And I do not wish this morning to condemn anyone here who struggles to read God's word in the Old Testament.

I'd only be condemning myself also if I did that. I only wish to implore you as I'm imploring myself right now as the psalmist implores us here in Psalm 119 to remember what God's word is and does for us.

[20 : 50] That it makes known the way of salvation that God loves us and cares for us and in Christ Jesus has died for us and that it's there as a helpful guide to persevere in this life for the life to come.

For anyone who is having a dry season in the word that it struggled to read let us not give up reading it. We have Psalm 119 to remind us to keep going and persevere as we read it knowing what it's achieving for us.

And so this morning we have a choice. Will we love the word of God like the psalmist does? Will we see what it does for us in showing us the way of salvation and enabling us to persevere in this life and therefore make it the rightful owner of our affection?

Or will we be blinded by worthless things temporary things in our life taking that steal our affection and take it away from God's word and in the end take it away possibly our salvation and the means of our perseverance?

Which will it be? So I I I I I I I I I I