

OPEN MY EYES

Text: Psalm 119:17-24

Readings: 1 Peter 1:10-2:3; 2 Cor 3:7-4:6

Belgic Confession Art 4 and 6

Theme: The psalmist expresses his constant desire to understand and obey God's Word. Purpose: To urge you to constantly desire to understand and obey God's Word.

The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia* which means "books". The Bible you have in front of you is made up of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

We call these books the *canon* of Scripture. "Canon" here does not mean a military cannon that shoots balls of metal or ammunition; rather it refers to a standard or a rule by which certain books were regarded as inspired by God and as canonical, as forming part of the Bible.

The canon of the Old Testament was already agreed on by the Jews by the time Jesus was on earth. The 27 books that make up the New Testament were accepted by the church during the first few centuries and were formally agreed on by the Third Council of Carthage in 397 AD. That Council formalized what the church had already agreed on for a long time.

The Roman Catholic Church also includes in the Bible the 12 books of the Apocrypha which were written in the 400 years between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of Christ. But Protestant churches do not accept these as canonical. These books provide a history of that inter-testamental period but they cannot be used to establish any point of Christian doctrine.

In his grace and wisdom God has given us this book, or this collection of books, which we call the Bible. We can read it at home and in worship. We are thankful for this Word of God and we want to understand it and to obey it.

This is **the theme of this part of Psalm 119.**

This long psalm is a beautiful series of reflections on the benefits and blessings of God's law. It is a psalm to read patiently and carefully, meditating on the immense value of God's Word.

The man who wrote it knew that life came from God and so he began this section of the psalm praying, "*Do good to your servant, and I will live.*" He asked for God's blessing in his life, for God's favour, God's grace. If God was good to him then he would enjoy true life, eternal life, a life of fellowship with God.

And in response he promised; "*I will obey your word.*" This is what he wanted to do.

After this opening prayer in verse 17 he prayed for an *understanding* of God's word (v 18-19), he expressed his *desire* for God's word (v 20) and his intent to *keep* God's law (21-23).

We will consider these three aspects to this psalm – his understanding, desiring and keeping of God's word.

1. HIS UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORD (v 18-19)

a. He prayed for understanding; "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

i. There are *many wonderful truths* in God's Word. The books of Exodus and Numbers describe the great deeds God did for his people Israel and the book of Acts describes the work of God in the New Testament church.

The Word of God contains profound truths, gracious promises and beautiful invitations. It has words of comfort, encouragement and hope.

Most wonderful of all, it is the astounding revelation about the Lord Jesus and all God the Father has done through him. It is the record of God's "amazing grace" in Christ, God's Son and our Saviour. The Old Testament looked forward to him in its promises, prophecies, people and events. The New Testament describes him in the gospels and explains him in the letters and in Revelation.

ii. But the only way we can understand these "wonderful things" is if God *opens our eyes*.

This is because by nature our eyes are closed to his light, our minds are dull to his truth, our hearts are hardened to his word. Because we are blinded by sin we need the illumination of the Holy Spirit; "Open my eyes that I may see...."

We are not asking for "new revelations of the Spirit" in addition to the Bible, nor are we asking for any books to be added to the Bible, like the Book of Mormon, or the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, or even the works of John Calvin. (cf. WCF Iv)

We believe that the canon of Scripture is closed. The Bible is the full and complete revelation of God. What he has revealed to us in his word is sufficient for his glory and for our own salvation, faith and life (WCF I vi).

When we pray, "open my eyes" we are asking that the Holy Spirit will help us understand what he has written.

Without this we would be like the Jews who read the Old Covenant but their minds are dull, a veil covers their hearts. It is only when they turn to the Lord Jesus Christ that this veil is taken away (2 Cor 3:14ff). It is only when we read the Bible with faith in Christ that we can truly understand its meaning.

All this is a work of the Spirit of God. He must shed his light on the pages he has written. Before we read the Bible we need to pray; "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

b. The Psalmist also knew he needed **the guidance of God's law**. v 19; "I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me."

There are many occasions in this psalm where he expresses the feeling that he was living in an alien environment among people who were hostile to God. He felt like Abraham, that he was a "stranger in a foreign country" (Heb 11:9)

The New Testament echoes this. Paul in Philippians 3:20 wrote that "our citizenship is in heaven." John Bunyan wrote about this in his great book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, describing the journey of Christian to the Celestial City. Like Christian all of us are on our way to heaven. Here we are strangers, pilgrims, wanderers, just passing through. Some of you may know the hymn; "I am a stranger here, within a foreign land; my home is far away, upon a golden strand."

If we are to find our way in this sinful world we need the guidance of God's Word. The Bible is like a map (or a Navman!), guiding us on our way. It is like a compass, giving us a direction to go in. The people of Israel were guided by the pillar of cloud and fire; we have something far better still - we have the Word of God!

c. So we need to pray for understanding and guidance.

Many of these verses are prayers. The psalmist was asking God for these things. He knew he needed God to open his eyes. He knew he needed the guidance of God.

How about you? Do you think you can work it all out on your own or do you recognise your need for understanding?

Do you imagine you can find your own way through life or do you recognise your need for God's guidance?

James tells us that often we don't *have* because we don't *ask* (James 4:2). Are you asking God to open your eyes so you can understand his law, and are you asking him to guide and direct you in your life as a stranger on this earth?

2. DESIRING GOD'S WORD. v 20, "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times."

a. His desire was **consuming**.

i. One translation puts it like this: "My soul is starved and hungry, ravenous, insatiable for your nourishing commands." He realized there was always more to know about God's law and truth.

ii. But he not only longed for God's commands but even more, for *God himself*. He wanted to know the God who had written these laws.

You might have a favourite Christian author; you enjoy his or her books and have read a few of them. One day you hear that he will be speaking at a conference near you. You want to attend and meet him in person and hear him speak.

This is true, in a much greater sense, for us as Christians. We want to know the author of this book. We won't meet him in person until we go to heaven, but in the meantime, while we are on earth, we can read his word and get to know him better preparing ourselves for the day we meet his face to face!

J.I. Packer wrote a well-known book along this line called "Knowing God" and R.C. Sproul has written a book called "One Holy Passion". Our one holy passion ought to be to know God and his word. What is your passion? What are you most interested in? What drives you? What is your greatest concern in life?

What or who do you long for? Can you say; "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times"? Is knowing God the strongest desire of your life? Is it your driving ambition to obey his commands and to serve him?

b. This was not only a consuming desire for this man but also a **constant** desire. He had this desire "at all times". It was always there; it never left him.

Sometimes you have a desire to do something but it doesn't last long. You want to learn ballroom dancing, to play the cello, to speak Spanish. You want to do a degree at university. But after a few lessons or lectures your desire fades, you lose interest, you drop the class, you give up practicing.

Sometimes you experience a desire to know God. You went to a youth camp or the Family Camp and came home all fired up! You attended a great Christian conference and you return ready to follow Christ! You hear a sermon on the importance of reading your Bible and you resolve to get up earlier every day so you can read and pray. But after a little while your enthusiasm dies away and you fall back into your old habits.

But this man had a *constant* desire for God and his word. It was with him "at all times". This must be true of us as well. This ought to be the pattern of our lives, our regular practice.

We have seen we must pray for an understanding of God's word and for guidance, and that we must desire God and his word. Finally we consider

3. KEEPING GOD'S WORD

a. We do this despite the disobedience of the proud.

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

The arrogant are those who are proud. They want to run their own lives, they think they know better than God, they refuse to listen to his Word, they ignore his commands and go their own way.

God hates those who are proud and he rebukes them. Think of Pharaoh and his hardness of heart, Nebuchadnezzar and his pride, Haman and his hatred for the Jews, King Herod and his cruelty.

We live in times when many are indifferent to God and his truth. They couldn't care less. But let's also remember that God will rebuke them. God will call each person to account. You need to continue with God's law even when other people around you are straying from it.

b. We must also keep God's word despite the **scorn of others.**

Verses 22-23; "Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees."

People ridiculed this man and laughed at him; they treated him with contempt as though he was nothing; they damaged his reputation with slander.

If you are a faithful follower of Jesus people will do the same to you. Jesus said that they hated him so they will hate us as well. Don't be surprised if unbelievers slander your name or ridicule your good life.

When that happens continue to keep God's statutes and meditate on his decrees (vs 22-23). God's word was written to teach us, "so that through the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). God's word will give you consolation and comfort, help and guidance, light and life.

This is why the psalmist delighted in God's law. Literally verse 24 reads: "Your statutes are my delight, the men of my counsel". Having God's law was like having wise men around him to guide him with their counsel.

We have the privilege of having God's word and even having our own personal copy. You can have the Bible with us wherever we go, in print or on your phone or your ipad.

Are you reading it?

When you read it do you pray for understanding? Do you search the Scriptures so God may guide you through the complexities of life in this world?

Do you long to know God's word better, and through it to know God better?

Is this the settled desire of your life?

Do you rejoice in all that God has done for you through the Lord Jesus Christ, all of which are recorded here in this book?

Amen