

## A Man of the Word

Psalm 119:1–8

The title of my sermon is “A Man of the Word.”

Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” One of the ways a person shows that he is born again is that he has a love for God’s Word, the Holy Bible.

This past week I preached the funeral for a former member of our church. I mentioned how when I visited him at the hospital during his declining days I would read Scripture, pray and sing to him. In spite of his extreme weakness he loved hearing the reading of the Psalms, especially. I mentioned how as long as I have known this brother, he had a love for the Word. His Bible was all marked up. He used a variety of colored highlighters to mark certain phrases and verses that he wanted to refer to again. The edges of the pages were beyond dog-eared from use. He loved his Bible, and he loved the Christ of the Bible. He loved the Psalms—the songbook of the Old Testament. Jesus said, “all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in *the psalms*, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). The Lord Jesus is the main character of the Bible. The Old Testament foretells his coming, the New Testament records that he indeed came, just as foretold centuries and millennia before. All three parts of the Hebrew Old Testament: the law of Moses, the prophets like Isaiah and Malachi, and the Psalms—the first and largest book of what was called the Writings—all speak of Christ. Christ is the Son of God and the perfect man—at the same time both divine and human, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity—very God of very God, who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He died and rose again, that we might live.

Because of Bob’s love for the Psalms, even to the last days of his life—I chose the first eight verse of the magnificent 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm as our text for that funeral sermon. But it is appropriate for the church’s worship as well.

Before we get into the specifics of what our text is saying, notice a few things about it. First, it is poetry. Here are eight verses, each divided into two parts. One can see this easily in verses 2 and 3—notice the parallelism between the phrases, “who keep His testimonies” and “who seek Him with the whole heart”; again, “They . . . do no iniquity” and “they walk in His ways.” The Hebrew Psalms have lots of these parallelisms, which help us understand what they are saying. Often, a more obscure statement is explained by its parallel statement. The genius of Hebrew poetry is that it can be translated into all the tongues of earth and it is *still* poetic. The poetry of the parallel and contrasting phrases is not lost in translation.

But before we get into the message of our text, notice that right above verse 1 is a Hebrew letter and its name: *Aleph* (א). The letters of the Hebrew alphabet are *named* (as are the Greek). Aleph means *ox*. The reason for this Hebrew word is to

inform the reader that the first eight verses of Psalm 119 all start with that same letter. In English the first three letters are *A*, *B*, and *C*. In Hebrew they are *aleph* (*ox*), *bēth* (*house*) and *gimel* (*camel*). There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and there are 22 stanzas in Psalm 119, each having eight verses all beginning with the same Hebrew letter—176 verses in all. The topic of the Psalm is the Word of God. The reason it is called the Word of God is because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Though King David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, may well have been the inspired penman, God is the ultimate author. Let me give you two proofs: (1) Hebrews 3:7, citing Psalm 95, says, “Therefore, as the *Holy Spirit* says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice.’” The words of the Psalm are not attributed to their human author, but to the Holy Spirit of Christ, their ultimate author. One more: (2) Jesus said plainly, “Thy word is *truth*” (John 17:17). He was talking about the Old Testament, but he did not refer to it as the word of Moses, or of Joshua, or of Ezra; rather, he called it “*thy* Word” (speaking to the Father). The Psalms are *God’s* word, and when their subject is “the excellencies of the Word of God” (the heading in the New King James version)—an excellent summary of the contents of Psalm 119—then the Holy Spirit of God pulls out all the stops, as it were and gives us a magnificent poem of 22 stanzas—176 verses in all—exquisitely written in elegant stanzas of eight verses, the verses of each stanza beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Now with that said by way of background, let’s get into our theme, “A Man of the Word.” Let’s look at three characteristics of a man (or woman) of God’s Word: he *loves* God’s Word; he *lives* by God’s Word; and he *looks* to the Christ of the Word. First,

### **1. He *loves* God’s Word**

The first characteristic of a man or woman of the Word is that he (or she) *loves* God’s Word.

Now those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ have no appetite for God’s word. They would rather fill their minds and hearts with other things that seem more important or interesting to them. Some of these things are good in themselves: making a living; choosing a spouse; raising a family; studying science, history, ethics; pursuing the arts—the list is endless. King Solomon is commended for his wisdom: “He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees . . . he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish.” These are all legitimate fields of study. Other things that people fill their minds and hearts with are not so wholesome—video games, gambling, pornography, promiscuous sex, committing crimes, etc. But whatever we consider more important than God and his Word is an *idol*, and the Bible says that idolators will go to the lake of fire. *God himself* must be the most important thing in anyone’s life. Now if we love God—if we long to know him and realize

that fellowship and union with him is the sweetest, most desirable thing in the universe—then we will *love* his Word. I remember when I was in college, and I was working a summer job. In the afternoon I would come home from work, and the first thing I would do, even before I opened the door, was to look in the mailbox and see if there was a letter from a certain young lady whom I was fond of—the woman that is now my wife. At that time she would write me a letter on beautiful dotted-Swiss stationery almost every day. I was falling in love with her; so consequently her letters meant a lot to me. I would read each one multiple times, memorizing the words, admiring the handwriting, looking for hidden meanings, hoping she would love me too. The letters meant a lot to me because the *woman* meant a lot to me; they were an expression of her person—the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

Now it's the same with a Christian. If the Spirit of God has drawn you to Christ, then his word becomes all-important to you. We see this clearly in the words of verse 5 of our text: “Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!” Here is the desire of the Psalmist's heart, his deeply-felt aspiration. He desires *God* more than anything else. He recognizes that his duty is to obey God—to keep his statutes (the things he has prescribed in his law). He doesn't obey simply out of a sense of duty, as we might obey a no-parking sign—when we would rather park close rather than further away, but we observe the no-parking sign out of fear of getting a ticket or having our car towed. No! The born-again child of God wants to obey God because he *loves* God! The Spirit of God has placed the love of God in his heart. The love of Christ constrains him to love his Word. He has a hunger and thirst for God's Word. He considers it of more value than his daily food. He prays, “Lord, I love you. I want to obey you. I desire, more than anything else, to know you better, to know your laws, to understand your word, to hide it in my heart, to meditate upon it so that I might not sin against you, to please you more than anything else on this earth. Lead me in your paths of righteousness, assure me that I am your child, help me to bring glory to you by my every thought, word, desire, aspiration. Help me to show the high and holy character of Christ in my daily living.”

A man or woman who loves God's word loves to *read* it—to spend time in it. He or she earnestly desires to think God's thoughts after him, to savor the beauty of the language, to admire its logic, to revel in its perfection, to experience its power, to realize its promises, to discover the *heart* of God. A man or woman of the Word *loves* God's Word. It is of more value than gold. Second,

## **2. He lives by God's Word**

Notice some of the phrases in our text—he walks in the law of the LORD, he keeps his testimonies, he seeks him with the whole heart, he does no iniquity, he keeps his precepts diligently, he learns God's righteous judgments. Here are descriptions of a man or woman who *lives* by God's word.

He doesn't just keep it on the shelf. He takes it down and reads it every day. He reads it aloud with his family. He shares it with people he meets. He endeavors to think God's thoughts after him, to put away ungodly thoughts and take every thought captive to the Word.

He has to make a decision. People are pressuring him to take a certain course of action. He has misgivings. Is it the right thing to do? Just the other night I heard the story of a young couple who needed to purchase a vacuum sweeper. They didn't have a lot of money. Money was tight. They went to Walmart. They purchased groceries and necessities. The vacuum was on the lower shelf of their cart. The cashier totaled up their order, and they paid their bill. When they got home they realized that the cashier had overlooked the appliance. Their first thought was: *sweet—what a great deal!* But what would God think? They wanted to do the right thing, even if it cost. The next day they went back to the store and settled up. They were offered 10% off for their honesty—and the item had gone on sale as well. But they had done the right thing. God's word plainly says, "Thou shalt not steal," and they had lived by it. The Lord rewarded them for their honesty. But even if he hadn't, they had the satisfaction of having done the right thing. They had a clear conscience. They had pleased their Lord. He who searches the heart knew that their purpose was to please him. They desired to have a conscience void of offense before God, and that was reward in itself.

What about you? Do you know God's word enough to live by it? Do you make it your purpose always to please him? Do you believe his promise: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you"? Do you believe that your loving heavenly Father will never fail you? Even if money is tight, he promises to supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. *Not: "out of his riches in glory";* that would be reward in itself, but "*according to his riches in glory*"—in a manner in keeping with God's superabounding generosity! He is the giver of every good and perfect gift; he will be no man's debtor. No man can outgive God.

The righteous lives according to God's word. What does this entail? Absolute perfection! "Blessed are the undefiled in the way"—*undefiled*, untouched by the stain of sin. Have you ever sinned? Of course you have. Have you measured up to the standard of verse 1? Let's go through the text: Do you "walk in the law of the LORD"—perfectly? Without fail? Never messing up? Do you "keep his testimonies"? Be honest now. Do you "seek him with the whole heart"? All the time? Without ever getting distracted? Do you "do *no* iniquity"—none? Do you walk in God's ways—all the time? The Bible says, "*All* we like sheep have gone astray"? Doesn't that apply to you? Be honest now.

To please God and inherit eternal life requires *absolute perfection*. God does not grade on a curve. He is not like a dishonest teacher who gives out A's simply

because the student's family has social standing and has paid the tuition. His standard is absolute perfection. Yes, the man of the word *lives* by God's word, but nobody does that perfectly. And that is why we need point three: the man of the word:

### **3. He looks to the Christ of the Word**

There's another way to look at Psalm 119. Remember that I reminded us of Christ's words in Luke 24, where he said that the Psalms spoke of him? Here's the good news: *Psalm 119 speaks of Christ*. Out of all the sons and daughters of Adam, who have gone astray, who have followed the way of sin rather than the way of righteousness, who have come short of the glory of God, there is One—and only One—who does in fact measure up, and that is Jesus Christ the righteous,<sup>1</sup> the Lord of glory who became flesh. Read the words of our text again and think of Jesus. *He* is the one who measures up—perfectly, without fail, every time.

Remember what the Father said of his Son at Jesus' baptism? As John was baptizing him, the Father spoke from heaven and audibly said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is such an important point that it is repeated four times in the New Testament—in Matthew, Mark and 2 Peter. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." How pleased is the Father with his Son, Jesus Christ? He is *well-pleased*. Here is the man in whom the Father is well pleased.

Now as Christians we make it our aim to please him. That is biblical. That is commendable. That is our duty before God.

But the plain fact of the matter is that we come up short. "All have sinned"—that includes every one of us. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The glory of God is absolute perfection. God is holy, righteous, just and good. His law is a reflection of his holiness. As far as man is concerned, we fall short. *Bad* people fall short of the glory of God—that is obvious. But *good* people fall short, too. Even our best works fall short of God's standard of absolute perfection. We are supposed to love him with all our heart. To love him with all our heart means that there is no room for anything else. He must be *first* in our thoughts and desires—always. To worship with his people and say, "Lord, I love you, I want you to be pleased with my worship"—and then to think, *Look at me, I'm doing pretty good; I bet my neighbors think well of me*—means that we are not loving him with *all* our heart. We went to worship with the desire to please God totally, but Satan tempted us with the thought, *hey, boy, you're doing pretty well*, and that spoiled everything. Once again, we come up short.

The only way that we can be well-pleasing in the sight of a God of burning holiness is to look to Jesus: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:1

faith.”<sup>2</sup> *He* is well-pleasing to God, and we need his perfect righteousness credited to our account in order to qualify for heaven. “What saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). The good news of the gospel is that if we, like Abraham, believe in the God of Scripture, it will be counted to us as righteousness as well. That is the righteousness that we need to enter heaven—the perfect righteousness of Christ.

The man of the Word looks to the Christ of the Word.

The deceased we remembered at the memorial service last Thursday was a man of the Word. He had a love for Holy Scripture and for the Christ of Holy Scripture. He well knew that he was a sinner with no hope of eternal life apart from Christ. He loved the Savior and wanted to go be with him forever—the Savior who said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

Bob was not perfect—neither are we—but believing in Christ, at the moment of his death he was translated into the presence of his Lord. At the final judgment the Judge will declare, “Come, thou blessed of my Father, enter into the joy of thy Lord”—not because *Bob* deserved it, but because *Christ*, his Savior and substitute, deserves it on behalf of all his people.

My dear hearers, aspire to be men and women of the Word. *Love* the Word, *live* by the Word, and *look* to the Christ of the Word. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Heb. 12:2