

Servants and Sojourners

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Psalm 119, verses 17 to 24. Who wander from your commandments.

Take away from me scorn and contempt. For I have kept your testimonies. Even though princes sit plotting against me. Your servant will meditate on your statutes.

Your testimonies are my delight. They are my counselors. So verse 17 begins the third section of Psalm 119 with a prayer.

And it says, deal bountifully with your servant. And if we were trying to kind of complete that sentence on our own. Without any context.

What would you say? Deal bountifully with your servant so that... Just think about it. How would you complete that sentence? Maybe deal bountifully with your servant God.

[1 : 20] So that I might be comfortable. So that I might be rich or successful. So that I might have the things I want in life. Deal bountifully with me Lord.

Bless me. That's an answer of a lot of people in this world. The psalmist answers it this way. He says, deal bountifully with your servant that I may live and keep your word.

He desires God's bountiful treatment. Because he wants to live in keeping with God's word. That's his desire. That's his goal in life. And the reason for that is found in the way the psalmist identifies himself throughout this section.

He calls himself a servant of God. And a sojourner in the world. And so the main point of this passage really is that as servants of God and sojourners in the world. We must depend on God's word and not depart from it.

So the first few verses, 17 to 20, is about our dependence on God's word. And then verses 21 to 24 contrast that with those who depart, the departure from God's word. So let's look at the dependence on God's word in verses 17 to 20.

[2 : 22] And it says, because the psalmist is God's servant, his preoccupation is with keeping the word of his master. And we ask ourselves, is that the desire, the foremost desire of our hearts?

To keep the word of our master. Do we live in keeping with God's word? Do we want to live, desire to live in keeping with God's word more than we desire to live in keeping with the expectations of other people in our lives?

Do we desire to live in keeping with God's word more than our desire to live in keeping with the selfish desires that we have? That's really the heartbeat of what it means to be the servant of God, the servant of the Lord.

But even that we can't do on our own strength. So we need God to deal bountifully with us. We need him to bless us. We need him to help us so that we might live and keep his word.

And that prayer of verse 17 is continued in verse 18 this way. It says, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I once heard this story.

[3 : 25] I think I shared it maybe two years ago when we were still at the Lusitania Club. I once heard this story about, I think it's high school students, a group of students that go on a trip through Europe to see historical sites.

And they went to the Louvre in France, which is, I think, the largest museum in the world. And they were examining a famous masterpiece.

I think at this point the story gets hazy. They don't know what it was. Maybe it was Da Vinci or Raphael or Rembrandt. But one of the students, who was evidently immature and supremely arrogant, began to rant and criticize the drawing.

And the professor that was leading the group grew impatient and then rebuked the student, saying this. This is an undisputed masterpiece by one of the greatest masters in history.

The artistic superiority of this painting was established 400 years ago and is no longer open to judgment. It is not the painting, but your taste that is open to judgment and has now been found lacking.

[4 : 34] So the law of God, which is another way that the psalmist speaks of the word of God, it says it's full of wondrous things. And if we fail to behold it, the wonders of God's word, then it's our blindness.

Its default does not lie with the word of God. It lies with us, our sight. So knowing that psalmist prays this way, Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

So are we beholding wondrous things out of God's law in our lives? Though the world might keep abuse and scorn upon it, the wisdom of God's word surpasses all the wisdom of the world.

There are wonders in God's word that far surpass the wonders that this sinful world offers. And if we are not enthralled by the wondrous things in God's word, we have to pray.

God, open our eyes so that we might see. We have to pray, as Ephesians 1, 17 to 18 says, That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give us the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

[5 : 37] Having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which he has called us. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. So because we are the servants of God, we have to depend on God's word.

And as servants of God, because we're servants of God, we're also sojourners in this world. So he says in verses 19 to 20, I am a sojourner on the earth. Hide not your commandments from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

So we're sojourners, meaning we're resident aliens, foreigners, because our citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven. It's in the kingdom of God. And like foreigners who know not the language and culture of the place that they live in and feel out of place or they feel lost in this world and need guidance, we're like that.

In this world, we are often lost. We need guidance because we live by the code of another kingdom, because we live, abide by the laws of another kingdom. And that's yet another reason why we depend so urgently on the word of God.

So Psalmist prays, you're hide not your commandments from me. I need it. I'm a sojourner on the earth. Hide not your commandments from me. And this request is kind of a surprising twist on one of the most common prayers that occur in the Psalms over and over again.

[6 : 56] And that prayer is, hide not your face from me. You've probably heard that phrase. If you've read the Bible, you've seen that in many places. But there's a twist on that. Here it says, instead of saying, hide not your face from me, it says, hide not your commandments from me.

And that twist shows kind of the link, the inseparable link between the word of God and the face of God. And it's that when we listen to and read God's word, when we listen to and read what God has said, that's when we behold the face of God.

We come to behold the face of the one who speaks when we listen, pay attention to God's word.

And so then that's all the reason how desperately should we long for God's word, depend on God's word.

Hide not your commandments from me. I'm a sojourner. I need your commandments. I must see your face. I must see your commandments. And so that's why the psalmist, it's almost, it seems, it's almost like a love poem, right?

You read verse 20. Can you imagine yourself saying that about God's word? My soul, my soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

[8 : 09] Isn't that amazing? I think I was talking to Zach the other night. And Hannah was talking about, she had just read Psalm 119 recently and she was like, yeah, it's a great psalm.

It's like, I'm reading it. I'm just reminded of how I just don't love God's word enough. And just, this is just, we long for it because we feel the face of God, because we hear the voice of God.

So that's why we should be dependent on God's word. And at this point of the psalm, the psalmist's mind kind of turns to the people in the world who are not living like that, who are not servant of God like he is, but instead are departing from God's word.

So it's the second point, departure from God's word. And he kind of reflects on that contrast between him and those people in verse 21. You rebuke the insulins, the accursed ones who wander from your commandments.

The psalmist, remember, he describes himself as a sojourner in verse 19. And here, those who reject God are described as wanderers. Because a sojourner has a destination.

[9 : 12] His is a temporary stay. He's a pilgrim on the way. But a wanderer is lost. A wanderer has no destination.

His journey is aimless. And this is the contrast between those who keep God's commandments and those who break his commandments. Those who wander away from God's word become objects of his rebuke. But in this world, which is in rebellion against God, the psalmist who is the, it's the psalmist who really should have the affirmation and praise of people.

He's the object of people's scorn and contempt. And so he asks God for deliverance from that in verse 22. Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies.

The vindication that God's people await for has not yet come. And so we also might be subjected to the same scorn and contempt from the insolent wonders of this world.

But this is then a helpful lesson for us. Because in spite of all that, the psalmist doesn't question his allegiance to God, his word. He doesn't say to himself, why do I bother with keeping God's testimonies when all I get is contempt and scorn from the people around me?

[10 : 25] Instead, he says this in verse 23. Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

Princes are likely a reference to people in power during this time, maybe rulers of the world who are persecuting the psalmist. But while they set themselves up as princes and rebelled against God, the psalmist humbly describes himself once again, as he did earlier in this section, as God's servant.

I love that contrast. The prince is, but the servant of God. And this is why, even though princes sit plotting against him, he meditates on God's statutes, because he's not a servant of these princes. He's a servant of the Lord. So even though they're plotting against him, he meditates on God's statutes, because that's what he's obligated to follow, because that's the person he's accountable to.

Not the princes of this world, but to God. And so verse 24 concludes this way. Your testimonies are my delight. They are my counselors. We find delight in God's word and receive direction from God's word.

[11 : 33] We turn to it like people turn to counselors, advisors, turn to consult God's word, to receive help and guidance, direction. That's the privilege of the people of God, and who delight in the testimonies of God.

And this persevering resolve that we see of the psalmist to depend on God's word is really pointing to and fulfilled ultimately by Jesus, who really is the only person that kept God's word to the end, who kept God's word perfectly.

And literally, princes plotted against him. King Herod tried to kill him when he was an infant. The rulers of the Pharisees falsely accused him, tried to get him executed. Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, sentenced him to death.

And through his death on the cross, Jesus made atonement for sins of his people, because we all failed to keep God's word perfectly. But he did keep it, yet he's the one that paid that price by dying on the cross for our sins.

And it's through that work that Jesus did on the cross that he takes wanderers like us and prepares for us a home in heaven so that we now become sojourners, right, with the destination on the way.

[12 : 46] It's through Jesus that he takes these insolent people, rebellious, accursed people, and redeems them and makes them servants of God, people who no longer are under God's curse, but under God's blessing, because Christ took the curse for us.

So that's really this psalm. I'm really enjoying going through this with you. Let's reflect on that and maybe sing a song.