

Mary Jones was a little Welsh girl, the daughter of a poor weaver. In 1794, at the age of ten, she began to lay by all the money she could possibly save, with her heart set upon buying a Bible. In 1800, after six years of carefully saving her pennies, she had the required amount. She had been directed to the Rev. Thomas Charles of Bala, who had acquired a number of Bibles for distribution. Mary walked barefoot twenty-five miles to his hometown. That evening, as she had been instructed by her pastor, she came to the home of David Edwards, a Methodist pastor of Bala. Early the next morning, David Edwards and the little girl were in the street and on their way to the residence of Thomas Charles. They knocked and were received in. David Edward introduced Mary, and she told her story of longing for a Bible and the years of saving up for it. After hearing her story, Mr. Charles turned to David Edwards, and he sadly said,

"I am indeed grieved that this dear girl should have come all the way from Llanfihangel to buy a Bible, and that I should be unable to supply her with one. The consignment of Welsh Bibles that I received from London last year was all sold out months ago, excepting a few copies which I have kept for friends whom I must not disappoint. Unfortunately the Society which has hitherto supplied Wales with the Scriptures declines to print any more, and where to get Welsh Bibles to satisfy our country's need I know not."

Until now, Mary had been looking up into Mr. Charles's face with eyes full of hope and confidence, but as he spoke these words to David Edwards, and she noticed his overclouded face and began to understand the full import of his words, she buried her face in her hands and wept. After a few moments, Mr. Charles rose from his seat and laid his hand on Mary's head. With his own voice broken and unsteady, he said to her, "My dear child, I see you must have a Bible, difficult as it is for me to spare you one. It is impossible, yes, simply impossible to refuse you." He turned to a cupboard behind him, and opening it, drew forth a Bible. Then, laying a hand once more on her head, he said to Mary, as she looked at him with inexpressible joy and thankfulness, "If you, my dear girl, are glad to receive this Bible, truly glad am I to be able to give it to you. Read it carefully, study it diligently, treasure up the sacred words in your memory, and act up to its teachings." As Mary wept tears of delight and gratitude, Mr. Charles turned to his friend and said, David Edwards, is not such a sight as this enough to melt the hardest heart? A girl, so young, so poor, so intelligent, so familiar with the Scripture, compelled to walk all the distance from Llanfihangel to Bala (about fifty miles there and back) to get a Bible! From this day I can never rest until I find out some means of supplying the pressing wants of my country that cries out for the Word of God.

It was out of Mary Jones's love for God's Word and her savings and prayer that the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed in 1804. (Source: *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, Ron Prorise)

Love for God's Word. That truth is supported and bolstered by a second, related truth that the psalmist brings out.

II. The Power of the Word is the Power of God

Not only is God's Word the medium through which you will encounter God, but God's Word is medium through which God's power changes your life.

Scattered throughout the psalm are statements about the Word's power and effects. As we read these, make no mistake: the Word does what only God can do. In other words, the Word is God's power at work. Let me point out just three: life, liberty, and light.

The Word brings life from death.

Psalm 119:25 My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word.

Psalm 119:37 Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, *And* revive me in Your way.

Psalm 119:40 Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me in Your righteousness.

Ps 119:50 This *is* my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.

Psalm 119:93 I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have given me life.
Psalm 119:154 Plead my cause and redeem me; Revive me according to Your word.
Psalm 119:156 Great are Your tender mercies, O LORD; Revive me according to Your judgments.

Who gives life? Who is the Lord and giver of life? Who is the resurrection and the life? God. But here it is equally said to be His Word.

First Peter 1:23 tells us we are born again by the incorruptible Word of God. God speaks and life springs up. He says, let the ocean bring forth, and the ocean teems with life. He says, "Lazarus come forth", and a dead man lives. He says to dead bones "Live" and they live. He says to the sinner dead in trespasses and sins, "Live" and we wake to life.

A man was once selling individual books of the Bible, but was stopped and robbed one night as he passed through a forest in Sicily. The robber ordered that he burn all his books. After starting a fire, the man asked the robber if he could just read a portion out of each book before he threw it into the fire. So when it came to Matthew, he read a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. The robber said, "That's a good book, we won't burn that one, give it to me." When he came to the Psalms, the man read Psalm 23, and the same thing happened. When he had 1 Corinthians, he read the love chapter, and the same thing happened. In the end none were destroyed and the thief took them all. Some years later that thief reappeared, but this time as a minister of the Gospel. The Word brought life. If you want life, it will come through the Word. Christian, if you want revival, it will come through the Word. The power of the Word is the power of God.

The Word brings liberty.

Psalm 119:45 And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.
Psalm 119:133 Direct my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me.

People think that law is the opposite of liberty, but God's Word, God's law frees. It liberates you. James calls it the perfect law of liberty. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. But who is it that is said to be the one who frees? Isaiah 61:1 "To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;" God is the redeemer, the one who sets slaves and captives free. But the Word does it.

If you want freedom from sin, freedom from habits, liberty from enslaving addictions, liberty from crushing depression or anger or lust, it will come through the Word. The power of the Word is the power of God.

The Word gives light

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.
Psalm 119:130 The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

Light means direction, guidance, and wisdom. Light shows you what is, so that you can find your way. The Word provides that light which explains life, guides us. But Scripture says this of God Himself: God is light, in Him is no darkness at all. Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

You want to understand your life, understand other people, be guided through this dark world, make sense of all the confusion? Only one Person can do that: God. And yet, it will come through His Word. The power of the Word is the power of God.

Only God can give life from death, true liberty from sin and self, and true light in the darkness. These three are all equated with the living words of God. It is when these words are read, delivered, heard, spoken, meditated on, learnt, memorised, that by God's sovereign decision, they bring life, liberty, and light.

Many Christians think God's Word is inert. The word inert means "lacking the power to move". In chemistry, it is used of a gas or substance that is inactive. It will just sit there unless you inject

energy or power. Some think that the Bible is an inert library book; a reference manual for spirituality. That explains why they don't read it, memorise it, study it, learn it. If I told you that certain words would bring life, liberty and light if you hear them, read them, understand them, receive them, repeat them, wouldn't you be interested in those words?

This is not a magic view of words, thinking that words are like verbal combination locks that unlock power. That is the view of the occult, of wicca, and even of the Word-Faith cult, the Health-Wealth false gospel. No, the biblical view is that words breathed out by God have power by His Spirit. When the meaning of those words is understood and rightly received, they will change your life, for by God's sovereign will, they carry the same power He used to create the world, the same sustaining word He uses to providentially maintain the world, the same power He used to raise His Son from the dead.

There aren't three easy steps to revolutionise your Christian life. But there is one massive change that will revolutionize your Christian life. Every time I have seen exponential growth in a Christian, it has come back to this thing. Every time I have experienced real leaps forward in my own life, it has come back to this thing. Recognise your communion and worship and whole encounter with God takes place in and through the mediation of His words. Realise that the very power to bring that revival and freedom and illumination comes from His Word.

If you believe those two points from today's sermon, it has to change how you treat the Word. If you believe it, it will change the quantity of the Word you take in. It will change the quality of how you take it in, with what kind of attention, and retention, and application. It will change how much you read, and memorise, how you pray with the Word, and counsel with the Word, and evangelise with the Word, and worship with the Word, and speak to others with the Word.

John Wesley: "I want to know one thing, the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. Give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God!"

What price for you on the Book of God? The price you name will likely explain much about your Christian life.

Love for God's Word. Hunger for the Word. Insatiable thirst for the Word. Spend anytime reading Psalm 119, and what will immediately jump out at you is the psalmist's attitude toward the Word. The Bible is not just a book, not even perhaps a faultless book to him. He is not a librarian, who happens to have indexed and classified the books of the Bible, who knows where each book of the Bible is and what it says, but feels dispassionate and cool towards them. No, the psalmist is an avid enthusiast of the Bible, a lover of the Word. He has been captured by the Word, and it has become the delight of His heart. He does more than read it correctly. He feels toward it correctly.

We hear a lot about being correct with the Bible, interpreting it properly, comparing Scripture with Scripture, applying it rightly, and that's as it should be. Good medicine wrongly prescribed can be deadly, and so is the Word in the hands of a bad interpreter, a careless reader or a false teacher. Correctness and accuracy is crucial.

But we do not hear enough about loving the Word. Not simply having the right technique when you read it or hear or learn, but having the right attitude, the right posture of heart, the right expectation of the Word. In other words, not merely orthodoxy in the Word, right doctrine, good interpretation. Not even just orthopraxy that emerges from the Word: true application, right living, right obedience. No, Psalm 119 is at pains to teach us right affection towards the Word: orthopathy, right pathos, right affection, desires when it comes to the Word.

In biblical faith, the heart always comes before the action, the motive before the method, the intention before the act. Christianity is an inside-out faith. Love for the Word before learning from the Word.

This is because your encounter with the Word is your encounter with God. It is a living, dynamic encounter, not a transfer or download of information from the Bible to your brain. It is a conversation between the Spirit of God and you. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Word of God is living and active. Scripture is not a stone monument, whose inscriptions can be read in winter or summer, Scripture is living and active, more like a flower that opens to the sunshine and warmth of loving interest. Living things require the living to treat them as living. God's Word is His will, and intentions and loves and heart. And therefore, our attitude towards God's Words is our attitude towards Him. Spurgeon said in some comments on Psalm 119: "God is not truly sought by the cold researches of the brain: we must seek him with the heart. Love reveals itself to love: God manifests his heart to the heart of his people."

Coldness will not do. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because while they had near perfect recall of His Word, they had combined it with cold heartlessness.

Matthew 15:7-9 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

And so with one voice the Bible speaks of receiving the Word with a right heart for it to be effectual. James says we must be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to get angry, and receive the implanted Word with meekness. Peter tells us to eagerly desire the milk of the Word like newborn babes. Paul said that the way to receive the Word was like the Thessalonians who welcomed it not as the word of men but as the Word of God. The writer of Hebrews tells us not to harden our hearts but to receive it like strong meat. And above all, Jesus told us in a parable that human hearts are like the ground, like soil. The quality of the soil determines whether a seed will germinate. If the Bible were to be a chemical, there is a minimum temperature needed for it to ignite.

But perhaps you might have an objection. Isn't God's Word powerful enough to need no positive attitude from us? Surely it doesn't need our help? When God said to Lazarus, "Come forth", He did not need Lazarus' cooperation, permission or inclination. God's Word was unilateral, monergistic. God's Word is a hammer that breaks the rock of a stoney heart in two. God's Word speaks and creates what it commands. So why should it matter if our hearts are warm towards His Word?

The answer is that when the thing is dead, or unliving or uncreated, then God speaks and brings into being what He commands. But once the heart has been converted from stone to flesh, He no longer needs a hammer to break the unresponsive heart. Surgeons use anaesthetics and delicate scalpels on their living patients, not chisels and mallets. Once the stone statue is now living and breathing, God deals with you as with sons. He says, "Come let us reason together" and marvelous as it is to us, the Creator wants your heart, your desire, your cooperation for His Word to work on you. I suppose He could cause His Word to work on you as it did on the day of your salvation, but it seems our Lord wishes to have friends and children, not marionettes or robots.

If you wish to see the Word of God brings its life and liberty and light to you, then you must learn the attitude of Psalm 119 towards the Word. If your encounter with the Word is your encounter with God, then you cannot encounter God with an indifferent heart and expect the encounter to be fruitful. Psalm 119 is going to show us the nature of that attitude, and then it will show us the nurture of that attitude. What it is, and then how to get it.

I. The Nature of a Right Attitude Toward the Word

The first, and most obvious nature of a right attitude is *delight*.

Psalm 119:24 Your testimonies also are my delight And my counselors.

Psalm 119:70 Their heart is as fat as grease, But I delight in Your law.

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Now Psalm 119 is not saying this in passing. Eleven times he speaks of *loving* the Word, eight times he uses the word *delight*, twice he calls it his rejoicing. Four times he says he will *praise*. Three times he says the Word is his comfort.

Sometimes he expresses this attitude in imagery.

Psalm 119:103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 119:72 The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.

Psalm 119:127 Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!

Psalm 119:162 I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure.

Psalm 119:111 Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, For they are the rejoicing of my heart.

He even expresses his love by its opposite and its corollary: hate.

Psalm 119:104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

These are all words of pleasure, of enjoyment, of satisfaction and happiness and joy. The Word is truly the highlight of his life.

Spurgeon: True Bible-readers and Bible-searchers never find it wearisome. They like it least who know it least, and they love it most who read it most. They find it newest who have known it longest, and they find the pasture to be the richest whose souls have been the longest fed upon it.

When one of our missionaries had to read a certain Book of the Old Testament through a hundred times while he was translating it, he said that he certainly enjoyed the hundredth time of reading it more than he did the first, for he understood it better, and it seemed to him to be fuller and fresher the more familiar he became with it.