

Believing

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[0 : 0 0] Well, a very good evening, one and all. Can I just say thank you for coming out this evening and what is probably the best day I think we've had in Scotland this year. And I'm delighted that you'd come out this evening to hear from God's words this evening. So why don't you turn to Psalm 119, if you have it there. That handout as well is going to be useful. So please have that in front of you as we go through this evening. But let's pause before we begin and let's pray together.

Oh, Father God, we thank you so much for this evening. And we thank you for the chance that we have at the end of our busy week to spend time listening to you. So I pray that you would speak to us by your spirit. And Lord, in the words of the psalmist, that you would open our eyes, that we would behold wonderful things in your words. And this is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So a couple of weeks ago, Alex, Chloe and I, we went to Brittany in the north of France for a holiday with my parents-in-law. We flew from Edinburgh to Bristol. From Bristol, we traveled in the car to Portsmouth. I'd never been to Portsmouth before. But as soon as we got to Portsmouth, we encountered the biggest ferry I think I've ever seen. Now, the only ferries that I've been used to in my lifetime come from the west coast of Scotland is that little Calmac one you get from Largs to Millport, you know the one? So I very much felt like I'd graduated from the lower leagues of Scotland to the premiership of ferries. So got to Portsmouth, got on the ferry, set sail, a lovely evening in Portsmouth, people waving us off, stunning buildings and coastline, and a real stillness to the sea. It was beautiful. As we progressed on the journey, we got a bit further out to sea. Things began to get a little bit choppy. Now, we had a bunk for the evening, and I don't know about you if you've ever tried to sleep on a ferry. I've never tried it before until last week.

It's not something I'm going to do again. I felt every single wave. I felt as if I could feel the sea moving, the ship. I was waking up feeling disorientated. I could feel that nauseating feeling inside increasing as we were going on and on and on. And I'm thinking to myself, I just want to get through this. And eventually, I woke up, and we're at the other side. The waters have stilled. The French coastline is there.

I'm watching the sunrise with a café au lait in one hand and a croissant in the other, living the French dream. And I'm making small talk with my parents-in-law over breakfast the next morning. And I commented on what I thought was a very rough night at sea. And they replied to me, groom, you've got no idea what you're talking about. I remember when we used to cross this channel when we were young on an old ferry. It was rocking all over the place. Grandma was literally climbing uphill to get to the toilet like a Navy SEAL. Graham, last night was absolutely nothing.

[3 : 16] Well and truly put in my place. And I think at that point, I decided I don't think I'm made for the sea. And I'll stick to Starbucks in the city center. Thank you very much. But it occurred to me, isn't being at sea a bit like life. There are calm times, moments of stillness and beauty, family vacations, time that we spend with loved ones, marriages, births, opportunities, the receiving of good news. But don't we also know that they are choppy times, when life gets tough, when that friend turns out not to be the trustworthy friend that you thought they were going to be. Unemployment hits, sleepless nights, stress at work, times when you don't feel in life like you're swimming, but actually like you're just trying to keep ahead, not to drown in the water. And then don't we know that there are calamitous times as well? When those test results come in that reveal the worst loss of loved ones, when you never seem to be able to shake away that dark, cloudy storm. And I guess my question for us tonight as we come to Psalm 119 is, in those calm times, in those choppy times, in those calamitous times, where do you go?

In those times, where do you look to make sense of it all, to keep with the analogy? When you have to put down anchor, where does it go down into? I've spent the last couple of months in Psalm 119, and, guys, I just can't get enough of this Psalm. And the reason is, I think, that it's so real.

It's so beautifully raw. I mean, the Psalmist, as you read it, he just tells it like it is. He doesn't sugarcoat how he's feeling. It's so refreshingly honest, and he just pours out his heart before God. And this is the point where I give you a quick overview of Psalm 119. This is some of the things that we see, like us. He knows rejoicing. He knows times of affliction. He knows peace in his own life. He knows times of sleeplessness. He knows times of praise. He knows times of distress. He knows times of confidence in God. And he knows times of doubt in who God really is. God, are you really there?

This Psalm is viscous thick with emotions. And the thing to see is that as the music of his life moves between the major and the minor keys, there's one thing that he clings to throughout all of this, and it's God's words. Now, here's what we need to do this evening.

We need to imagine that Mr. Psalm 119 is standing right here in front of us. Now, there's been a change to the preaching schedule. I'm not going to preach tonight. You're probably delighted to hear that. But what I'm going to do is I'm going to hand over to Mr. Psalm 119.

[6 : 24] He's going to do the preaching this evening. He's got the microphone. And to some extent, this is what we do every time we open our Bibles. We want the Bible to speak. We want Mr. Psalm 119 to speak. And what's his topic for this evening? Well, we just want to know, what does he believe about God's words? Because I think what he will tell us is that God's words is in the ups and the downs of his life. God's word is the most important, trustworthy, and loving word in his life. He delights in God's word. He loves his Bible. He leans his whole life on it. It's the only sure path for his feet. It tells him the difference between what's right and what is wrong. It tells him. It shapes him. It molds him. He trusts it. And see where Mr. Psalm 119 is, what he believes about God's word. Friends, that's what I want to believe about God's word.

These are the convictions that I want to have. And these are the truths and the convictions I want you to have as well. So I want to believe what he believes. And so the question is, how has he got there? Well, from our verses this evening, verses 65 to 72, he's going to tell us three things about what he believes about God's word. Now you see this all the way through the psalm, but I think you see them in these verses particularly. What does he believe about God's word? Here's the first thing that he believes, that God's word is revealing.

Now I wonder if you've ever heard that age-old objection to religion, that when you take away all the traditions and practices, that essentially they're the same thing. Have you heard that before?

And the argument goes something like this. Imagine that there are six blind men in a room feeling an elephant. And one man, he feels the tail and he concludes that, hey, God must be like a tail.

And the other man, he feels the tusk and he concludes that God must be like a tusk. And the other man, he's there, he feels the ear and he proclaims and concludes that God must be like an ear. And so on and so forth. Therefore, this is what it's like when you're trying to understand what God is like.

[8 : 48] Essentially, you're talking about the same thing, but you're talking about it with your own interpretations of it. There's the objection checkmate. Well, friends, I hope you can see two massive inconsistencies with that argument.

Firstly, the person telling you the story is assuming the place of the only one in the room that can see the whole thing. But even more importantly than that, secondly, what happens if the elephant speaks? And says, no, listen, I'm not a tail. No, no, I'm not an ear either. And I'm definitely not a tusk. I'm an elephant. There's no mystery to who I am. I'm telling you who I am.

I'm an elephant. What happens at that point? You see the Christian faith right at the heart of it? Revelation. Now, we don't worship a book. We worship the God who has made himself known through the book. God speaks. Look what the psalmist writes at verse 72.

The law from where? Your mouth. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. Here's his conviction. The unfathomable has made himself fathomable.

It's quite a tongue twister, that one, isn't it? The unfathomable has made himself fathomable. God's not playing hard to get. He's not playing hide and seek. He's not waiting for us to figure him out because let's be honest, that would never happen. God has lovingly taken the initiative and fully disclosing himself for everyone to see. Now, Amy or Ewing, some of you might have heard of her.

[10 : 33] She's written a fantastic book on this subject. She says this, At the heart of the Christian faith is the revelation of a personal God who can be known and related to. What does the psalmist love? He loves that God has made himself known in his words.

Throughout this psalm, you'll see the psalmist using eight different words to describe God's words. He's going to talk about God's instruction, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, words, promise, all words that he uses to describe what God has said, what he's doing creatively in kaleidoscopic fashion. There's another tongue twister. He's telling us that he loves it all, all of it he loves, that God would make himself known to him. It blows his mind.

And so if God has revealed himself, I guess the next question is, who has God revealed himself to be? Well, look at how the psalmist addresses God at verse 65. He says, Lord, that's a little word that is so easy to miss and assume. It's a word, a name for God that is packed full with meaning. The psalmist worships the covenant God, the God of steadfast love, the God who has made himself known to Israel, the God of all grace, the rescuing God, the providing God, the God who leads his people and protects his people, the loving God, the unchanging God, the God who is for his people, the promise keeping God, the God who said, you are my people and I am your God. The Lord is who he addresses and worships, the Lord who God has revealed himself to be in his words. Now, the psalmist, whenever he's writing this, it certainly was BC, i.e. it was before Jesus.

And what an incredible privilege it is to sit here, the other side of the cross, to have the whole Bible, to have the New Testament, because we know that God has supremely revealed himself and spoken finally in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, God in the flesh, not just a reflection of who God is, but the exact radiance of God, his father. In other words, this is what we need to understand. Jesus shows us God as he truly is. How do I know God loves me? How do I know he is for me? Well, look to the cross. There we see the son of God, the living words suspended there for us, taking our sin on the cross, taking the blame that was yours and mine on his shoulders.

Jesus, the one who lost all his glory so that you and I could be clothed in it. Jesus, the one who was shut out from his father so that you and I could gain access. Jesus, the one who was bound and nailed so that we could go free.

[13 : 49] Tim Keller, a great author, he puts it like this, only through weakness and pain did God save us and show us in the deepest way possible the infinite depths of his grace and his love for us. Two modes of revelation, God's words and Jesus, the living word, as is written about in the words, they reveal to us one God, a God who is delightful.

And why has God revealed himself? Well, God's not revealed himself simply for information. God's revealed himself for relation. Not just so that you and I can know things about God, but so that you and I can know this living God. He is not silent. He is not silent. He speaks.

You see, this is not our best guess at what God is like. This is how we know what God is like. The God who spoke creation into existence reveals himself. Now, brothers and sisters, I wonder if that truth still thrills your heart. The God who holds galaxies in his hand, he's revealed himself to us. Think about it. Without revelation that you and I would be walking around blindly in darkness, we'd have no hope of knowing God. We'd have no hope of knowing about the way unto salvation. What a glorious thing that revelation is. And we do well as we pick up our Bibles every day to remember that, to stop and to think about what we're doing. And I know it's true in my own life. How at times I'm so complacent, I'm so apathetic, and I'm so quick to rushing in to reading this. This is no ordinary book. C.S. Lewis, who one of my friends described him as the poster boy of evangelicalism this week, he said this about the Bible. I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, and myths my whole life. I know what they're like. I know none of them are like the Bible. This is God's words. This is God speaking. That when you and I open our

Bibles, we meet with the living God. And this should create in us a deep humility. That we open our Bibles and we put ourselves under it, not over it. That we listen to what our Bibles are saying, what God is saying. We listen to what it says. We don't tell it what it should be saying. Look at the words that the psalmist uses to describe himself, verses 65 and 66.

What does he call himself? He calls himself a servant. And how does that manifest himself? What does he pray, verse 66, teach me? It's this God, this gracious God who has made himself known in his words, this God that the psalmist knows personally and deeply, that the psalmist now turns and says, I trust your words.

[17 : 00] I trust it. And that's the second thing that Mr. Psalm 119 would say to us this evening, that God's word is true. It's true. It's the thing around which he bases his life. He depends on it. He follows it.

He walks in its instruction because he knows it's the truth. And he trusts it. Now, let me just make the observation, living in this world that we do, do you not know it to be true that we have massive trust issues as a society? Do we not? And not just as a society, we have massive trust issues in our own hearts. Some of you wouldn't trust the politician. You would not trust a journalist. You would not trust a football player. You would not trust a car mechanic. You might struggle to trust a doctor.

And don't I know it to be true in a previous life of mine, some of you would struggle to trust a lawyer. Do you want to know how many lawyers it takes to change a light bulb? It takes three. One to climb the ladder, one to shake it, and one to sue the ladder company. But our society doesn't trust.

So quickly, we're skeptical. And the thing to see here is that if we're not careful, that attitude can make its way into what we think about God's words. It's so popular in our day for people to write off the Bible, simply outdated thoughts, that God has passed his sell-by date, that this book has been corrupted by men, that this book is full of errors and unexplainable contradictions.

Can I say if you've heard that at some point in your life, it's just not true. You can trust God's word. There's two things I want us to see that we can trust about God's word.

[18 : 50] Firstly, we can trust its composition. In other words, we can trust how it's been put together. That the Bible that we have in our hands is in the format that God intended it to be in.

In other words, you can trust what we have is what God wanted us to have. Now, the thing is that that's a massive subject. It's needing a lot more time than what we have tonight. But if you want to read more up on the reliability of the Bible, if that is something that you're struggling with, can I recommend this wonderful little book by Barry Cooper? It's called Can I Really Trust the Bible?

It's 100 pages. You'll get through it in an afternoon. You'll feel great that you've read a book. But if that's something that's on your mind, can I really encourage you to get into that? You can borrow my copy. You'll get it for £3, I think, online. But it's a great book written for Christians.

Christians and non-Christians alike seeking to answer some of the common objections and problems that people have with the Bible. But all for now we'll say is that you can trust its composition.

And secondly, you can trust its contents. In other words, every word in the Bible is there because God wanted it to be there. There are no unexplainable contradictions. There are no errors.

[20 : 03] This book holds. And you can trust Jesus on this one. Jesus believed the Scriptures can't be broken. That every word was from God himself.

Jesus in John chapter 10, confronting the Jews who are ready to stone him. He quotes Psalm 82 saying that the Scriptures cannot be set aside. It's the Greek word *lou*, which in context means that God's word cannot be broken.

It cannot be nullified. It cannot be invalidated. You see, Jesus approached the Scriptures confirming the chronology. He confirmed the events. He confirmed the history. He confirmed the authors.

He quoted Moses. He quoted the prophets. He even quoted something like the events of Jonah as being absolutely true. For Jesus, Scripture is powerful. It's decisive and authoritative because it is the voice of God.

And it can't be true. It can't be wrong. It's always true. And you see, that's what Mr. Psalm 119 is saying to us this evening. That God's word is not telling us lies.

[21 : 14] That to follow God's word is to follow the truth. That's what I want you to understand this evening. As you live your life as a Christian in this world where the Bible and its teachings are continually being questioned and rejected, you can understand and know that your faith is not based on irrational confidence.

It is based on historical fact. That you can always trust God's word. All of it, all the time, every verse, without exception, without end, because it's the truth.

It's telling you the truth. You can trust it when it tells you that God created the world. You can trust it when it tells you that Mary was a virgin. You can trust it when it tells you that Jesus did miracles.

You can trust it when it tells you that he was innocently crucified. That the tomb is empty. That he rose from the dead and he reigns in heaven and he will return to judge the living and the dead.

You can trust it. The Bible is true. And therefore, this is what we need to see. Verse 66. Let's make the psalmist's exclamation our exclamation.

[22 : 27] What does he say? Teach me knowledge and good judgment for I trust your commands. Now, let me ask you right now.

What are you trusting in this evening? What are you leaning your life on? What is shaping your life? What is guiding your life?

Whatever that thing is that you're thinking about. The question is, is it true or is it false? Now, Christopher Ash, who's again written another great book on this subject, he puts it like this.

The word of God gives us the only reliable map of the world as it truly is. You know, the Bible, if you want to think about it this way, it's like the picture in the front of a jigsaw box that makes sense of all the bits of the puzzle that are inside.

The Bible gives us a truthful and accurate view of ourselves. That we are more deeply flawed than we ever care to admit. But we are more deeply loved than we ever thought could be possible.

[23 : 31] Kevin DeYoung writes this. He says, if you ever think to yourself, I need to know what is true, what is true about me, true about people, true about the past, true about the good life, and true about God, then come to God's words.

You can trust your Bible. And here's the third thing that Mr. Sam 119 would tell us. God's word is good. God's word is good.

God's word is good. God's word is good. And secondly, I concluded that I think she's screaming because she doesn't think that I'm going to put the clothes back on her. That I'm going to leave her in the cold. And it's interesting because now when I change her, she's quite happy about it.

I mean, she puts her foot in her mouth now and tries to eat it, but she's quite happy. because she understands a bit more about who I am and how this whole process works. So let me ask you this evening, what is your understanding of who God is?

What do you believe about God's words? Is he like the cosmic traffic warden out to spoil your fun and just to keep watch?

[25 : 07] I mean, we love traffic wardens in this city, don't we? Is he like the divine tax man? Is he someone just to be begrudgingly obeyed, not to be enjoyed, but what is Mr. Sam 119 saying?

He's good. He uses that word five times in these verses alone. God's good. God's good and that's why I follow what he says. Look at verse 68.

What does he say? He says, you are good and what you do is good. Teach me your decrees. This is the God that he knows and he worships.

He worships. God is good and what he does is good. God does not lay down arbitrary rules. God doesn't bark orders so that we would be restricted and miserable.

God never says anything that is unloving or unwise. His demands, his words are always noble, they're always perfect, they're always righteous and they're always wise.

[26 : 11] And don't miss what the psalmist says at verse 71. The psalmist is saying here, very profound. The psalmist sees God's goodness.

Where? In his affliction. So, understand it like this, that the psalmist in his own words here, what is he doing? He's going astray.

He's going away from God and something happens in his life, God brings some kind of pain or something happens in his life in order to help him see the folly of his ways and to bring him back to God's words.

Maybe that's a description of where you are this evening. I mean, is the Lord in his wisdom and his goodness, is he teaching you something?

Is he allowing you to experience something in order that you might see the folly of what it means to go astray and that he might bring you back to his words? Do you see how the psalmist sees that as the goodness and the grace of God in his life?

[27 : 16] Do you see how the psalmist has a stable and settled confidence in the goodness of God? He sees this affliction, whatever it was, whatever it's to do with the smearing campaign that's going on against him, he sees this affliction as the goodness of God in his life.

And that's gutsy faith. And it's a challenge, isn't it, to us? Can we say that? Do we believe that? Do we know his goodness?

Do we trust in the goodness of his words? You know, I think, I know this in my own prayer life. I know so often I pray to God and I ask him for what I want rather than trusting in that he knows what I really need.

Now remember that we come before God as Abba Father, not Sugar Daddy. So when God says something, we can trust his heart behind it. When God gives something, when God prohibits something, when God gives us something that we don't like, that we know the goodness of the God who stands behind the Bible.

You know, I read this quote this week by a woman called Anne Voskamp. I'll be honest, I don't know who she is. I read her in a book and she says this, if trust must be earned, hasn't God unequivocally earned our trust with a bark in his raw wounds, the thorns pressed into his brow, your name on his cracked lips?

[28 : 51] You know, I think our problem so often is that we come before the God that we've conjured up in our own minds. I know what it says, but God couldn't possibly be like that.

I know what it says, but that's not the God that I believe in. And I think that's why it's so important that God's word is the thing that is filling our minds. That the God of our understanding and the God of the Bible, they match up.

That our faith rests on God's words and what God has said in his word and not simply on Christian cliches or the things that we understand with our limited imagination.

Because the thing is, when we gaze at God's words, when we gaze at how God has revealed himself to be and immerse ourselves in his words, we find there a God of infinite love and beauty.

We find a gospel that is richly glorious. We find a God who is so far above the things of this earth. And we find a savior who is altogether victorious.

[29 : 54] So as we close our time together this evening, let me take you back to the Brittany Ferry. And let me ask you that question that I asked you at the start.

In the calm, in the choppy, in the calamitous of life, where do you look? How do you make sense of it all? Well, let me read you a couple's story that I read recently in a book that I was reading.

This couple are called Mary and Martha. In fact, they're called Mark and Martha. I need to get a new spell checker. Wasn't a time for a joke, was it?

Okay. This is Martha. Their words. Martha, as my husband Mark sits in his wheelchair, unable to move anything but his eyes, and even that being increasingly difficult, we're approaching the 10-year point in our journey.

It began with a small twitch when Mark was 48 years old, and within a month, our doctor had diagnosed the cause as the terminal illness, ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

[31 : 06] We'd been married 25 years, and we had four children. We'd always been an active family, so Mark's quick physical demise was absolutely devastating. When Mark got sick, I fell into a black hole of despair.

I didn't know how I was going to live through the pain of the coming days. I was struggling. During those early days, Mark and I quoted every verse we could think of telling us about God's care.

We attempted to find ways to beat into our hearts the love and faithfulness of God. We planted our feet in the truth that we understood, even though everything else in our lives was telling us otherwise.

And this is Mark's testimony here. It says, Mark, and in brackets, writing at a computer that captures his eye movements. He says, I have found that singing scripture and hymns and African-American spirituals in my head to be so helpful during these last years.

Sometimes I say I am suffering unfairly, but the only one who went through suffering unfairly was Jesus. His separation from the Father on the cross has been anything of experience.

[32 : 25] How can I complain when he went through cosmic pain for me? Martha again. We found meaning, purpose, joy, and growth and wholeness in our loss.

I see how sorrow and intense sweetness are mingled together. The depth and riches of life has come in suffering. How much I have learned and how much sweeter Jesus is to me now.

Isn't that a heartbreaking yet heartwarming story? There's a couple whose roots go deep into God's words. They know who God is, they trust him, and they know his goodness.

And so they would echo a hearty amen to what Mr. Sam 119 has been saying to us this evening. that God's words is the most important, trustworthy, and loving word in our lives.

Now there's two things I want you to do this week. Firstly, you should have received a Sam 119 bookmark. Or if you didn't get a bookmark, there's ones on the way out. You can see it on the reverse of your sheet as well.

[33 : 40] It's just a reading plan for this Sam. Can I encourage you to get into it? Get into it, immerse yourselves in it, read through it, pray through it, learn it, get it into the pores of your skin.

And the second thing you need to do this week is come back next Sunday night. And we'll ask Mr. Sam 119 having heard what he believes about God's words, we're then going to ask him to tell us what he feels about God's words.

Let's pray together. Father, we are so grateful.

Lord, we are amazed that you have not left us in the darkness. Father, we worship you that you have made yourself known to us. You've revealed yourself to us.

You have not remained silent. Father, I ask this week for us all that you would lead us by your words. Father, that we would love your words, that we would immerse ourselves in your words and by your spirit you would lead us by your words.

[34 : 54] So help us to love it, help us to live it this week we pray. Amen.