

Placing Hope in His Word

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Stephen. Great to see you folks. My name is Graham. I'm the pastor here of the church. It's lovely to welcome you in particular if this is your first Sunday with us. Maybe you're new to the area. Maybe you're visiting Edinburgh for the weekend. Maybe even this is your first Sunday in church. I just want you to know how welcome you are here today.

And in case you're wondering where those verses fit in, we have been in a series as a church over the summer in this Psalm, Psalm 119, the longest chapter in your Bible that comes up in the pub quiz. You can have that for free. We've been working our way through it, thinking about what this tells us about the words of God.

So you're going to need to have those verses open in front of you this morning so we can see the treasure that's contained in it. Here is what any financial advisor worth their salt will tell you is a sound investment strategy.

It's called diversifying your portfolio. In other words, it's a good idea to not just invest your money in one thing.

Actually, it's a really good idea to spread the risk and invest your money in several things. Or if you want to put it another way, if that's kind of above your level like me, really simple, complete the phrase that we use all the time.

[1 : 14] Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Yeah. And this is how we think. It's good to have a backup plan in life.

It's good to split the risk. It's good to have all of our kind of hopes and ambitions in lots of different places just in case one of them happens to fall. And why this is worth listening to this morning is because the advice of the Psalmist when it comes to the Christian life, the Christian faith, is that it doesn't work like that.

And actually embracing that has led the Psalmist not to despair. It's actually led this guy to delight. And already I'm interested. I wonder if you saw that word crop up as we read it through.

Now here's the question. What is the secret sauce? Yeah. What is his discovery? What has he found that he wants to share with the peoples of the world? Well, have a look at what he writes at verse 114.

And if you want to have a verse to kind of grip onto as we go through this this morning, this is a good verse. You see it there, Psalm 114? Here's what he writes. I hope.

[2 : 23] That's going to be our key word this morning. I hope in your word. And that's his way of saying when it comes to life and what it's all about and my future and my present.

All my eggs are in this basket. He holds up his Bible and he says, all my eggs, all my hope, I'm all in with this. And the word hope, if you notice it there, comes up a few times in these verses.

Just scan your eye over it and see if you can spot them. The word hope comes up along with, if you notice it there, this idea of longing. Did you notice that?

And waiting and panting and desiring. It's all kind of encapsulated in that word hope. Now, I don't know what your current relationship status is with the word hope.

As you walk in these doors this morning, maybe you're hopeless. Maybe you're hopeful. If you're a Scotland fan, this has kind of been the journey over the last couple of weeks, hasn't it?

[3 : 25] Notes in our odds for qualifying going from, what was it, 64% to 0.75%. The most Scottish thing ever is you looked at that stat and you thought there's still hope. What is your relationship with the word hope this morning?

Because we're creatures, aren't we? As creatures, we're hardwired for hope. Something needs to get us up out of our beds every morning. It's a horrible thing when there's not.

Something needs to give us purpose. Something needs to give us a reason to live. And the psalmist is saying, my hope, the thing that gets me out of bed every morning, is what I find in your word. Now, to some extent, the themes that we're thinking about today, if you've been tracking with this series over the last number of weeks, in essence, it's really nothing new.

Because remember, we're kind of dealing with a psalm here. And yes, it's a delightfully and deliberately composed celebration of the word of God.

[4 : 25] But we come here not expecting to see a logical, flowing argument. Because the psalms are the songs of the soul as we find them in the Bible.

Here are emotions. Here's life in the raw. Here is what it feels like to be a person of faith in a faithless world.

I guess it's a bit like this psalm is a bit like looking through a kaleidoscope. If you remember this when you were a kid? It's the same colors, but you're just seeing it in different dimensions and angles and beauties.

I reckon that's what this guy's playing at in this psalm. A new, delightful combination that he keeps seeing as he picks up the Bible and says, I hope in your word.

So there's nothing new here. But I don't know about you, but I find that really reassuring. And here's why. Because I am so prone to forgetting. And we so quickly forget.

[5 : 25] I don't know about you, but my attention span at the minute, it doesn't feel very long. We're at a stat this week. I don't know what you're like when you're online. But apparently the average person expects a website to load in two seconds or less.

And we will give it eight seconds before we either refresh the page, think there's something wrong with the internet, we're on the phone to Virgin Media, or we just give up entirely after eight seconds. We're people who are prone not just to forget.

We're people who are prone to be impatient. And it's good to be reminded of where our hope is. Because I don't know about you, but so often it feels in my life like I'm like a paddling pool that sat outside in the sun for a few days and been left.

And I've just leaked hope. Leaked the gospel. It's so good for my soul to be reminded of the certainty of the thing that I am hoping in.

And of course, that's exactly what Anna was saying. So here's what we're going to see this morning. The psalmist is going to tell us one reason why we might stray from the scriptures. And then he's going to tell us three reasons why we can stick with the scriptures.

[6 : 36] And here's my really simple aim. It's to help us see that three is bigger than one. Come with me and see. Here's the one reason we might stray.

One of you saw it here. One of you noticed it. One thing that might cause us to feel a little bit hopeless. And it really is simply when others mock and despise the Lord.

And in the psalmist, it seems like this is people both from within and without. Have a look at it here. People from within, he calls them double-minded at verse 113. This is our first verse, right?

Double-minded. Which is a word in the Bible. It's all about your heart attitude. It's kind of like you're wearing a 50-50 t-shirt. You've got a foot in both camps. This is a double-minded person.

So here are people that he's looking at in the community who are wearing the faith costume. But actually, with the words and their deeds, they're giving the message that they're entirely in a different camp.

[7 : 37] They're doing religious things. But they've got a heart that's driven by the desires and the behaviors of the world. And somehow they're thinking that God should be happy with our robotic gestures and our hollow worship.

So this is one camp that he sees. People from within. But then he also looks out and he sees the people from without who are mocking the living God.

Verse 119. People outwith the people of God. He calls them oppressors. Do you see that? Verses 122 and 134. People who mock the idea of faith.

You're hoping in what? You're trusting in who? You believe in what? And in turn, these groups of people, what are they doing? Verse 136, as he brings this together.

They are not keeping God's law. And you see and do you hear the perplexion in his voice. And I take it what he writes at verse 126 gives us permission to feel a holy distaste when God's ways are totally violated.

[8 : 53] A compassionate concern when God's ways are ignored. But the psalmist is trusting the Lord. And he's trusting the Lord that he will judge those who mock him in his own way and in his own perfect time.

But in the meantime, do you see verse 118? How he's having this little inner pep talk with himself. Do you see it? Verse 118, he's reminding himself that this group within, this group without their delusions will come to nothing.

And what the psalmist is saying is that he wants God to help him stay true. That's his prayer. And how is he going to stay true? How is he going to stay the course? Only by God's grace. Absolutely. But I think the psalmist is showing us a much better way to keep the course. His prayer is not that God would take him out of the world.

Right? Not out of the world. I always love the insight of Wilbur Chapman here over the years. He said this. He said, it's not the ship in the water, but the water in the ship that sinks it.

[10 : 03] So it is not the Christian in the world, but the world in the Christian that constitutes the danger. In other words, the answer is not to come out and be separate. Neither is it to blend in and conform.

The psalmist is showing us here that the answer in the Christian life is for God to awaken in us a love for something better. And here's how I think this works.

I hope you find this helpful. If not, amuse me. Okay. Here's influential New York food critic Mimi Sheraton describing her love affair with caviar.

It is now odd to think that when I was a child, I tasted caviar. It seemed horrible. All that oily fishiness popping on the tongue, exclamation mark.

And then one day when I was about 20, I tried it again and couldn't believe I had not loved it at first taste. What seemed fishy suddenly I perceived as having an alluring deep sea flavor with a silky gliding texture and a tintillating tongue curling edge of ripe earthiness that spoke to me of endurance, quality and development.

[11 : 12] A lessing in growing up and maturing taste. Now I understood about 50% of those words, but I got what she was saying. Never tasted caviar in my life. I'm not sure that's going to change.

But after reading that, I want to try it. Right? I want to try it. And I think the psalmist is playing a similar game in this psalm. Right? For the word that comes up five times in these verses is the word love.

I love your word. Scan your eyes and see if you can see. Now, that is not accidental repetition. Nor is that evidence of a limited vocabulary.

That is affectionate emphasis. I love your law. Verse 113. Verse 113. I love your law.

And that takes us to the three reasons, friends, why we can stick with the scriptures. You ready for this? Here's the first one. Three reasons we can stick. The first one is all to do with what the word is. What the Bible is.

[12 : 19] Have a look at verse 115. Come with me. See it? He says, so that I can keep the commandments of my God.

Now, you do well to notice the personal pronoun there. Do you see it? My God. My God. My God. My God. So he's owning the fact that this is my God.

This is not our God. This is not a Hail Mary prayer to any kind of God. This is a God that I know personally and has revealed himself personally to me. You know, John Stott always said that his biggest fear for students that came to his church down in London who were studying theology is that they would graduate talking about God in the third person and not the second.

That's really interesting, isn't it? That was his heart. Very perceptive. And I tell you, my biggest fear doing this role is that I get really good at doing this.

And I get really bored with Jesus. And central to that not happening is reminding ourselves what this word is.

[13 : 34] It is God-breathed. And this is one of the core convictions, I guess, that Christians have about the Bible. That this is not a coaching manual. This is not a self-help book.

Nor is this a collection of short sayings. Nor is this a collection of Norse myths. This is the breathed-out word of the living God.

Which means that when we open our Bibles, God opens his mouth. He still speaks through what he has spoken. And because it is God's word, do you see how he says, the psalmist is saying, this is totally trustworthy.

Can I tell you that you can trust the Bible today? You can trust two things in particular real quick. You can trust its composition. That the Bible that we have in our hands is in the precise format that God intended it to be in.

We can trust that what we have is what God wanted us to have. You can trust the composition. Listen, if you're struggling with that this morning, thinking I'd love to read a bit more about that, can I recommend this little book called Can I Really Trust the Bible?

[14:42] By a guy called Barry Cooper. If you're in Kindle, it's in a cheap Kindle deal just now. But if you want it, come and grab it. I'm sure we can get other copies. Because it's really important to think about. Because if we can't trust this, then the game's off.

He's saying, the psalmist, I can trust its composition. But secondly, I can trust its content. Every word in the Bible is there because God wanted it there.

There are no unexplainable contradictions. There are no errors. This summary, this holds. We can trust God's words, all of it, all the time, every verse, without exception, without end.

And the psalmist meditates on that. And he thinks to himself, this is a place where I can drop down an anchor in my life. And maybe that's exactly what you're searching for today.

It was American lifestyle guru, Tim Ferriss. Read him recently. He had this phrase where he said, reality is largely negotiable.

[15:47] And I guess if you're a billionaire, you can kind of play with that for a little bit, right? And it sounds cutting edge and it sounds snazzy. But how on earth do you live your life if reality is changing all the time?

Verse 142. The psalmist is rejoicing in the fact that God's righteousness is everlasting. He looks up and he takes stock that God's word originates in eternity past.

And God's word will not be moved or changed or grow powerless. It is timelessly perfect. And because it's timelessly perfect, this is a safe place to drop the anchor in your life.

You know that old feeling when you look at an old photo of yourself? And I don't know, maybe from years ago you've got a meticulous comb over you thought was trendy back in the day.

Or you've got a groovy set of ripped jeans. Or whatever it is. What do you look at that photo and think to yourself? What was I thinking? Yeah? What was I doing?

[16:59] What the psalmist is saying here about God's word is that unlike us, it's not going to change with the seasons. Yeah? It's not going to change with the seasons.

It's not like a carton of milk you've got in your fridge that you've left for a couple of weeks and forgot about and it's gone off. There's no expiry date with God's word. There's no expiry date with his promises. So the psalmist here looks down the line of history and he sees generation after generation after generation walking around God's word as it were, kicking the tires, making sure this thing stands.

And they're testifying, putting their hands up, saying this is something that we can rely upon, the word of God. And he's good. And this God always delivers on his promises.

Do you see that verse 140? What is he rejoicing? That your promises, God, have been well tested. That's what he's saying. It's me and my generation. Generations.

Generations before me have said that God is good all the time and all the time God is good. Your servant loves them. The second reason, friends, that we can stick with the scriptures is all to do what the word gives.

[18:10] Do you see him tell us, verse 130, the unfolding of your word? That just means when we look at it, we hear it preached, when we base our lives upon it, what does it do? It gives light.

Now, do you know what woke me up the other night? The lightning. Do you see it? Thought there was a police van outside. Thought there was fireworks going off. But I'm waking up because our room is lit.

It's pitch black outside, but it's lit. And this is what he's saying. God's word, when I spend time meditating on it and thinking about it, it's like it lights up my life. That's what he's saying.

And it imparts understanding to the simple. So he's reflecting on the fact that God's word, as it gives light to his life and to our lives, it gives him more insight, more wisdom, more understanding than anything else that's out there on the market.

And so his advice is that when it comes to wisdom, don't start by looking in. Don't start by looking out.

[19 : 11] Start by looking up. The psalmist looks up and he sees the heavens that declare to him the glory of God, the sky that declares his handiwork, the stars that are singing about the glory of the creator who made them and gives them number and calls them out.

And as he looks up, he then, as it were, he looks down. He looks down to the Bible in his hands and the God that he knows. And he says, this is the place where I'm basing my life.

Friends, how easily we're deceived into thinking that our better life and better joy and better wisdom is to be found out with God's word than it is within it.

And notice the humility in his voice as he prays verse 144. Give me understanding that I may live. Do you know what this is? It's the confession of a lifelong learner. Give me understanding. There's a great thing too. If you're in the habit of reading the Bible every day, that is a great verse to put on a post-it note and stick on the front of your Bible.

[20 : 20] Give me understanding. But it's also more than just a little tip. It's actually a revelation that I find really refreshing. Because at the end of the day, who is this guy?

We don't know his name. Don't know who he is. Is he a colossus of the faith? Is he a spiritual giant? No, actually at the end of the day, do you know what he is?

He's a lost sheep just like you and I. And Mr. Sam 119 is so aware of his weakness, fragility, and complete reliance upon the Lord.

And is that not the authentic Christian life? Do you not know that to be true? One minute you're singing, the next minute you're straying. I take it this should encourage us.

Like a magnet and with the iron fillings, we should be drawn back to God's word. And so he concludes about the word, verse 126.

[21 : 21] I love it more than gold. And as if he pauses, I can do better than that. I love it more than fine gold. In the midst of all the commotion and he's surrounded by mockers, he says, verse 123, do you know what?

I long for your salvation. In other words, I long for your promise. I long to see the thing that you said will happen come true.

He's longing for God's promised rescue to come. And he's declaring, would you have mercy on me? Would you forgive my mistakes? Would you make me yours?

Friends, you know what? In one way or another, he's longing for the cross. And this is where we'll kind of bring it to close this morning and land on that note.

He's longing for the cross. You know, my favorite story from the World Cup so far is the one featuring this guy called Anthony Alanga.

[22 : 25] You might not have even noticed this, but I noticed it because I'm a preacher and I like looking for sermon illustrations. Anthony Alanga. So playing for Sweden. And in their last group game, they draw 1-1 with Japan.

And Anthony Alanga slumps to his feet in despair. Because he's not aware that actually a point was good enough to see them through to the group stages. So he's sitting there in despair.

And actually all it takes is one of his teammates to come over to him and remind him, actually, Anthony, see that point we just won? Actually, that got us through. And do you know what? It reminded me of the reason why I love coming to church every Sunday.

It's because so often I feel like that. It's been a really tough week. Messed it up in so many ways. My thoughts and emotions are all over the place. And do you know what? Sometimes, like, it's a real effort to try and get here.

But do you know why I love coming here? I love coming here every Sunday because it reminds me that there's a victory that's already been won. You like me? Reminding ourselves that there's a victory that's already been won.

[23 : 31] Why do we meet on a Sunday of all the days of the week? Why do Christians meet on the Sunday? It's because it's the day when Jesus rose from the dead. So, friends, there is every reason to hope.

Be reminded that there's something worth celebrating. Just see verse 122 just as we close. The psalmist is praying here. And I think the ESV captures it slightly better than the NIV.

He's saying, God, would you give me a pledge of good? So what's he saying? Would you show me that you're always for me? Would you show me that you love me?

Would you show me that you're true to your promises? And I wonder if you're thinking that this morning. How do I know God loves me? How do I know I can trust on his every word?

How do I know that he's for me? Do you know the answer to that question? Because we're living this side of the cross. The answer is Jesus. Friends, if you're struggling with that thought this morning, drag yourself to the cross.

[24 : 37] It's why we sing about what Christ has done. It's why we speak to each other about what Christ has done. It's why we spend our time thinking about the Bible because it reminds us about what Christ has done. It reminds us who our Savior is.

We drag ourselves to the cross and we see the Son of God, the living Word, having lived and breathed this psalm. We don't have time to go into that, but he lives and breathes this psalm. Suspended there on the cross for our sin, for our mistakes, for our shame, taking the blame that was ours on his shoulders. Jesus, the one who set aside all his glory, did it so that we could have it by faith in him.

Jesus, the one who's died and the one who has risen. Jesus, the one who stands at the right hand of the Father, bearing our names as his dearly loved and adopted children.

Jesus, the one who stands at the right hand of God, interceding and praying for us. Friends, the Word of God is where life is. Do you know why? Because the God of the Christian faith is a God who speaks.

[25 : 45] And central to what he speaks is Jesus Christ crucified. And here's the point. Think in that verse. Christ Jesus is God's glorious pledge of good to us.

Tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love. Let me pray. And so, Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this new day.

Thank you today is Sunday. Thank you that today, Lord, is the day when we remember that Jesus is alive.

And so, Father, we bring all of our concerns and our worries and our burdens and our sins, and we bring them to your Son. And we remember his life.

We remember his death. We remember his resurrection. We remember his ascension to your right hand. And we remember the fact that one day he will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and usher in a new creation where righteousness dwells.

[26 : 56] Lord, we remember the old, old story today. And so, we thank you for your word. Thank you for this series in Psalm 119, just reminding us of the centrality of your word.

Father, we thank you that we've heard through Anna's story today as well, that you are a God who's in the business of transforming lives. So, Lord, encourage us.

Lift our eyes. Lift our chins. Lift our thoughts to the greatness of Jesus, we pray. In his wonderful name. Amen. Amen. Amen.