

Psalm 119:97-112 Getting Stuck in... to the BIBLE ALL AGE

What do you think of when hear word bible? (ASK) Suspect if you asked around you'd get a lot of answers. Big scary book (like King James). Or bible basher (SLIDE). Hard to understand. Long (million words – like one of my sermons).

Topic this morning – next in series Getting Stuck In. What does a real Christian life look like? Focused on Jesus, involves using our gifts and money, joining in with his mission, and praying. Also needs this (BIBLE). How do we know what God thinks about stuff? Sometimes he tells us directly, sometimes through others: but mostly we find it in here.

Still good question to ask – why do Christians value the bible so much? Well, you only have to read Psalm 119 all the way through to find out. But that would take about 15 minutes, so I've just chosen this little chunk to give you a flavour. And even here in these verses, we find the psalmist gives us 3 good reasons to love the bible, God's word. In fact he describes the bible in 3 different ways, all of which point us to how important it is to anyone who wants to know and love God. And I've got 3 items here which might help us to understand this.

The first item is this: can anyone tell me what this is? (TORCH – SLIDE).

And what do you use a torch for? (SEE IN DARK). And that's the first image that our reading uses for the bible: READ v105: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* But how much use is a torch at the moment? Why's that? (It's light). So when is a torch useful? (Dark.)

Now that's the point we might miss in our bible reading – when the writer of the psalm says that God's word is a light to our path, we have to assume that the path isn't very well lit, it's dark, or he wouldn't need a torch. Now can anyone tell me, what the path is meant to be/represent? (Life).

So what he's really saying is that life is tricky, we don't always know the right path. The bible, God's word, is like a light for that path, like a torch that we can use to know how to journey well through life.

I was very fortunate growing up: my mum and dad both gave me a love for God's word. My dad was a great preacher (much better than me), and one of my memories of mum is that she was very faithful in reading her bible, she loved to sit and spend time with God every day. Sadly she died a few years ago, but even in those last months, it was amazing how peaceful she was, how much she had a clear sense of who she was, and where she was going. Mum had a good torch, her illness was not a dark place for her, she lived in and by the light, and that light was this, God's word.

I think it was Spurgeon (maybe Moody?) who said this (SLIDE) '*A bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't.*' Don't use that as an excuse to deface our lovely new pew bibles! But it makes the point doesn't it – best thing to do with a bible is read it. And as we do that, we get a lamp for our feet and a light to our path.

OK, so that's the first one – the bible is a **light** to help us see the way. The second is this. Who can tell me what this is? (RUBBER RING). Now does anyone know what the Americans call this? (SLIDE Red and white ones – LIFE PRESERVER). And what's it meant to do? (SAVE/PRESERVE LIVES!). Here's what Psalm 119 v107 says: *I have suffered much; preserve my life, O Lord, according to your word.*

God's word is a **life preserver**. Whoever the psalmist was had a tough life, from the sound of it. But where did he look for strength? In himself? In his family connections? In his financial security? No, he looked to God – and in particular, he looked to God to preserve his life *according to his word*.

God's word is full of promises. And the psalmist knew those promises, he knew God to be the source of life, his protector, his strength. And in tough times, it was God's promises that the psalmist clung to, just like someone in the water would cling to this ring.

But we can't duck the question: what does it mean for God to preserve life? It doesn't mean that God preserves our physical life at all costs. But I think life in the bible is defined according to bigger dimensions. *Life is what it means to be connected to God, the source of life.* Yes, that means life here, physical life: but ultimately it means relationship to God, spiritual life, eternal life.

We're thinking about a new vision for us as a team of churches and we've come up with this: (SLIDE) That's the kind of life that God intends for us. And we get connected to that life every time we read this book, these are the words of life. Preserve my life according to your word: God's word is a life preserver, a life saver.

So a torch, a life preserver, and finally: who knows what this is? (COAT OF ARMS – SLIDE – merchandise – SLIDE2) And if you look closely, you'll recognise the name... oh yes. (Have I showed this before?) I googled 'Trendall Coat of Arms' a couple of years ago and, lo and behold, this is what came up. So it's official: we are a classy family.

But what's the point of coat of arms? (SHOW YOU HAVE A HISTORY). A coat of arms is a form of heritage, isn't it? Not that ours is up to much: as far as I knew, the Trendalls could only be dated back as far as blacksmiths in 19th century South London – cockney wideboys then as now!

But this idea of heritage, of history, is the last image we see in this passage: READ v111: *Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.* You can see what the psalmist is saying, can't you?

He's saying, God, you and me, we have a history, right? And my life is really the story of obeying your word. That's my heritage, that's my history. (That's what the psalmist is saying.)

In fact, it's something similar to what Jesus told the disciples at the Great Commission, which was our other passage. He told them to do 3 things, didn't he: to go, to baptise, and to teach them to obey everything I've commanded you. In effect he's saying: you and me, we've got a history, we've been together these 3 years and I've told you lots of stuff. Now you go and tell others. Because your family line isn't just going to be your immediate family, but a worldwide family. I want the world to get their own family coat of arms: but on it, I want the name Jesus (**SLIDE**). The family of Jesus.

I'm very fortunate – because of Mum and Dad and some other great role models, God's word is my heritage too, to be honest that's what would be on my coat of arms rather than a white stag and a couple of fluffy feathers. But there you go, it's probably all you can get for 20 quid on a dodgy website.

So what do you need today? Which image speaks most to you? Do you need light in a dark situation, or life preserving in a place of suffering, or just to remember again, that you and God have a history and a heritage. My prayer is that God would touch our hearts again to treasure his word, and we would all commit again to let it be your light, your salvation and your heritage.

AMEN. / LET'S PRAY.