

GOD'S WORD AS YOUR LAMP AND LIGHT

Today's Text: (a) Psalm 119 (b) 2 Tim. 3: 14-17

Extracts:

- 1. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path [Ps. 119: 105]**
- 2. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work [2 Tim. 3: 16-17]**

In August 2001, I accompanied some of my colleagues to Grand Riviere Bay on the north coast of Trinidad to watch the giant female sea turtles lay their eggs. Every year, between March and August, female turtles come all the way from the coasts of Africa to lay their eggs in Trinidad, which is a place of birth for sea turtles. An average sea turtle can weigh as much as 2000 pounds (910 kg.) and be as long as 80 inches (2.1 metres). You have to go in the night because the turtles come out only in the dark to lay their eggs. After over 4 hours' wait that night, we were lucky to see a giant turtle come ashore out of the water. It dragged itself to a spot on the sandy beach, dug a deep hole (about 3 feet), laid many eggs and covered everything up, such that the spot was completely disguised. Then, it dragged itself back into the water on its return to Africa. Some eight weeks later, the eggs would hatch and the baby turtles would find their way back to join "mummy" in Africa!

How do the young turtles know their way back to their place of residence from their place of birth? Scientists have discovered that once in the water the young turtles latch on to patches of sargassum weed (algae) that float on the water surface. While feeding on the weed, which is driven by ocean currents, the turtles find themselves in Africa where "mummy" is waiting!¹ But how do they know that the alga is the exact weed to float on? Like all of God's creatures, they know their "appointed times ... and observe the time of their coming" [Jer. 8:7]. Since we are created in the image and likeness of God, He has also planted radar in us to lead us to safety with Him from the cradle to the grave. What is that radar and how can we access it? In today's lesson, we shall use Psalm 119 to answer those questions.

¹ www.ms-starship.com/sciencenew/turtles.htm

1. A night journey requires light!

Imagine yourself going on a night journey from your home in the city to visit somebody in the countryside. No matter your means of transport, you will need light because it is nighttime. Why? Firstly, it is dark and you want to be able to see ahead of you. More importantly, if you are driving, you may be obeying the traffic *law*. While you are in the city, there are also bright streetlights. Later, when you are now away from the city, there may no longer be streetlights. Instead, there may be white markings on the road to indicate to you the *way* to go. You will agree that, in spite of the fact that your car lamps are switched on both in the city and in the countryside, you are likely to drive faster in the brighter portions of the way. Such portions are where both your vehicle lamps and the streetlights are on. Therefore, the motorist who drives at night needs *both* the lamp and the streetlight.

Our journey through life on earth is similar to a night journey. However, like the turtle, we also have in-built radar to guide us through. The only difference is that, because we are made in the image and likeness of God, with the gift of the exercise of *free will*, the path we choose is not automatic. Our body is like the vehicle described above, which needs lamps to move at night. Jesus Christ has said, “The lamp of the body is the eye.” He added, “If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness [Matt. 6:22-23].

That suggests that we can choose to walk by two contrasting lamps. The bad eye can be likened to the *naked eye*. It is the natural/physical eye which can only see natural/physical things. Its lamp is the physical eye. Since the eye can only see with light, it relies also on natural lights, such as the sun, moon, stars, or artificial lights, such as lamps or electric lights. Understandably, therefore, a person using the natural eye can only walk by sight. To walk by sight is to be carnally minded, that is, to live according to the flesh. Those who live in the flesh cannot please God because “to be carnally minded is enmity against God for it is not subject to the *law of God*, nor in deed can be” [Rom. 8: 7,8]. That is like driving your car at night without switching on your car lamps or driving at top speed in the dark. Of course, you will not please the law enforcement agency by so doing, nor in deed can you! The way of the transgressor is hard [Prov. 13:15].

The good eye can be likened to the *spiritual eye*. It sees the spiritual light that does not come from natural sources like the sun. In the order of creation, God created light on the first day [Gen. 1: 3] and the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day [vv. 14-19]. Therefore, the light of God is not the same as the natural lights that we see with our naked eye! That is why the Psalmist has said of God, “For with You is the fountain of life; *in Your light we see light*” [Ps. 36: 9]. In fact, that is the “true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” [Jn 1: 9]. That light is, of course, Jesus Christ who has Himself told us, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” [Jn 9: 5]. He promised believers the

Holy Spirit's indwelling when He said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that *He may abide with you* forever- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, *but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you*" [Jn 14: 15-17]. Consequently, "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" [Prov. 20: 27].

The spiritual eye is spiritually minded. A spiritually minded person is one who lives *according* to the Spirit of God and does the things of the Spirit. This road leads to life and peace [Rom. 8: 5,6]. This is analogous to driving your car at night and obeying all the traffic rules in terms of lights and speed. The likelihood is that you will not receive any violation tickets from the police and you can minimize accidents! In like manner, *when we choose to go God's way, His word becomes the lamp to our feet and the light to our path.*

2. What is the word of God?

Psalm 119 has given us examples of the word of God as follows:

a) *Law, statutes and commandments*

The Psalmist writes, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the *law of the Lord*" [Ps. 119: 1], "keep Your *statutes*" [v. 5], and "look into all Your *commandments*" [v. 6]. According to the Webster's (unabridged) *Third New International Dictionary*, a law is divine teaching or instruction, especially a divine commandment or revelation of the will of God. A statute is something laid down as declared or fixed, a law. A commandment is what is commanded to do or to forbid. Clearly, all three are of a statutory nature and legally binding. A good example would be the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20: 1-17]. They set out how human beings must obey and honour God through love of God and their fellow beings.

b) *Ways, precepts*

The Psalmist also refers to blessed people as those who "do no iniquity. They walk in His *ways*" and "keep [God's] *precepts* diligently" [Ps. 119: 3-4]. Webster's defines a way as the road to a place, the manner, method or style of acting. A precept is a command or principle intended as a general rule of action. Thus, God's ways and precepts prescribe for us the conduct that is acceptable to Him.

In human conduct, there are acceptable ways of doing things. Usually, they are defined by cultural/national values that may not be in the law books. For example, if an American, a European and a Chinese were to sit around the same table to eat rice, the American would hold his fork on the right, the European on his left and the Chinese would use chopsticks. They are all right *according to their cultural values*! In like manner, God does

not look at outside conduct but what is in the heart. For example, the people of Israel thought that they were doing great when they fasted but God found their conduct unacceptable. “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” [Is. 58: 6]. Jesus has warned believers that adultery has occurred as soon as we feel lust toward a married person in our hearts! [Matt. 5: 28]. Therefore, the word of God extends beyond mere mechanical compliance with the letters of the law.

c) *Testimonies, judgments*

The Psalmist says, “blessed are those who keep His *testimonies*, who seek Him with the whole heart” [Ps. 119: 2] and “I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous *judgments*” [v. 7]. Again, Webster’s defines testimony as firsthand authentication or open acknowledgement of a fact. Judgment is a formal and authoritative pronouncement or opinion after judging a matter. In human terms, that is equivalent to the ruling of the Supreme Court on a matter. It becomes the binding interpretation of the law on the matter. Thus, testimonies record what God has done for those who have trusted Him, such as the story of the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt, and the release of Peter from maximum jail by an angel. Judgments, on the other hand, record how God has punished disobedience, such as Satan being thrown out of heaven for rebellion [Rev. 12: 7-10].

Most countries of the world have based their national laws and constitutions on the above aspects of the word of God. Even in some advanced democracies that practise secularism, attempts to move too radically towards laws devoid of God’s moral code have been staunchly resisted. The fact is that “man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God” [Deut. 8: 3; Matt. 4: 4].

3. Why we need the word of God all the way

The Psalmist is authoritative that the word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths [Ps. 119: 105] because it is the absolute truth *at all times* [v. 160], promises God’s mercy [vv. 41, 58-59, 64-67, 71, 77, 124, 176] and assures us of God’s protection [vv. 114, 121, 134], great treasures [v. 162], and great peace [v. 165]. In general, the word of God, as summarized in the Scriptures, serves the following purposes in our walk through the earth [2 Tim. 3: 16]:

a) *A source of inspiration*

Different people or philosophies inspire people when they need encouragement. Some people resort to Yoga and other transcendental

practices. Some rely on religion by any name. Yet, they never obtain the peace of mind that they are looking for. I wonder why such people have not gone to the word of God, spoken at various times and in various ways through the prophets and recently by His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ [Heb. 1: 1-2]? To emphasize this point, Peter the Apostle wrote, “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as *a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*, ... for prophesy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” [2 Pet. 1: 19, 21].

b) *Profitable for doctrine*

Most philosophies are based on human wisdom and formulations. Therefore, they are limiting because “he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all... for He whom God has sent speaks *the words of God*” [Jn 2: 31, 34]. Consequently, only doctrine based on the word of God can be regarded as true and sound. When the risen Christ met two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He drew their attention to what the Scriptures had said about Him in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the psalms. Later, the two said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He *opened to us the Scriptures*?” [Lk 24: 27-32]. When Paul summarized the doctrine of Christ that he was preaching, he always qualified it with “according to the Scriptures” [1 Cor. 15: 1-4]. In deed, the word of God is profitable for doctrine.

c) *For reproof and correction*

In our walk through life, we may run into temptation and backslide. It takes the word of God to bring us back. For example, He has promised forgiveness to all those who repent [1 Jn 1: 9]. That gives us the boldness to come before His throne of grace. Which earthly judge do you know that will set free an accused that admits and confesses his crime? At best, the punishment can be reduced but not cancelled. God forgives and forgets!

Josiah was only 8 years old when he became the king of Judah. It was at the height of the people’s backsliding. As they were clearing the garbage in the now dilapidated temple (built by King Solomon), the priests discovered the Book of the Law. The king caused it to be read to his hearing. “Now it happened, *when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law*, that he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded [them] saying, “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, *for the people and for all of Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written*

concerning us” [2 Kgs 22: 1-14]. That was what set off a major spiritual revival in Israel. The word of God convicts and converts.

d) *For instruction in righteousness*

But for the word of God, many of us would have no hope of salvation. We would have had to wrestle with the challenge of making heaven by our own efforts, but we know that the gospel of Christ is “the power of God to salvation, for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek, for in it the *righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’*” [Rom. 1: 16-17].

4. Conclusion

The word of God is dynamite because it is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” [Heb. 4: 12]. When this word of God became flesh, He dwelt among us as Jesus of Nazareth. On His resurrection and ascension, He went to prepare a place for us in His Father’s house. Then, He promised, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” [Jn 14: 2-3]. The Word of God indwells us when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” [1 Cor. 12: 3]. Consequently, the body of the true believer has become the temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 6:19] and of the living God who has said of believers, “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people” [2 Cor. 6: 16].

Your spirit is the lamp of God. The word of God is now embodied and personified in Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. Having accepted Him, your lamp has been powered by the Holy Spirit and your spiritual eye can see the Light of God and of the world, Jesus Christ! Your steps are now sure and steady.

Only one in ten baby turtles may arrive safely in Africa. Predators, human or other creatures, kill the rest. In like manner, unbelievers have no chance at all! Satan and the cares of this world will drown them. Some believers may suffer persecution or even be martyred. That does not mean that they have made mistakes. Rather God has His purpose for each of us and He does not need to disclose it to us. Therefore, let the word of God be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Stay on course and let God do the rest.

That is the only safe way!