

Meditating on God's Word

Psalm 119:97-104

10th July 2011

If someone passes you in the street or maybe bumps into you at work or the school gates or as you pass in the aisles at Tesco – and they say “Hello how are you?” how are you likely to respond? “Yep I’m fine” or “I’m good” or “I’m okay” – and then we may walk on by. It is a brief exchange between friends or acquaintances. There’s nothing wrong with this – it’s simply the way we are but if that is the only type of conversation we ever have then our relationships always remain superficial. It’s only when we really talk and honest feelings and emotions are shared that people really get to know each other and we become real people who can be known, loved and helped. Sadly our tendency to adopt superficial conversation sometimes spills over into our communication with God. Our prayers for example can easily become just a quick ‘hello God I’m feeling grim please help’. Don’t get me wrong God still hears us and understands us but there is a danger that we become shallow in our relationship with him. God, however knows each of us intimately and wants to have genuine fellowship with us.

The book of Psalms is great example of in-depth relationship with God. It is an amazing collection of songs and prayer expressing the heart and soul of humanity. Its writers honestly pour out their true feelings, reflecting a dynamic, powerful, and life changing friendship with God. You hear the Psalmists crying out to God in depths of despair as well as hearing them singing to him in the heights of celebration. Throughout the Psalms you hear people sharing honest feelings with their God.

So as we look at this small section of Psalm 119 let’s pray that it will help each of us here (myself included) into an even deeper and more genuine relationship with God. From our passage this morning notice all eight verses are very positive. There are no traumas, trials or petitions; these eight verses ask for nothing, but consist entirely of testimony and praise and they literally ooze passion and love for God’s word.

So here’s another question: Do you have a passion or something that you just love, enjoy and know inside out. Maybe it’s food, cooking perhaps gardening, DIY, music, shopping, flower arranging, sport, films or perhaps some kind of art. Here’s my passion when I was a child – “Statistics” – well actually “Football Statistics”. Ask me anything about league positions, who won the cups, who the players were from 1968 to 1972 and I’ll know the answer – even now. If there had been a degree in football stats at the time I’d have passed it with distinction. So what are your passions? Take two minutes and chat to two or three people around you about something you love and feel passionate about.

Let me now offer you a few quotes...

- It is as vital as food. It feeds me spiritually, physically and emotionally as well as providing guidance, comfort and wisdom. It is a necessity, not an option.
- It tells me how God wants me to live in a complex world.
- Each time I read it I learn something new about me, about God and how much he loves me.
- I could not function without it. It begins each day to assure me that God is with me and his love is always there.

They are all pretty passionate aren’t they – so where did they come from? These quotes came from people who visited our Christmas Tree festival last year and wrote on a tag their response to the question “What does the Bible mean to you” before attaching them as a decoration on one of the Christmas trees. All of them express their love and passion for God’s word. Which fits pretty well with the first verse from our reading this morning – “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long”. And then verse 103 from our reading: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! As you talked about your passions just now I bet many also have an uncanny wisdom for their subject. That is probably because you love your passion and have spent ages engaged with it.

These eight verses from Psalm 119 reveal the Psalmist’s passion – it was God’s word. God’s word is not just for our information, it is our transformation. Being a Christian gives us the opportunity to develop a deep relationship with God, not just a superficial conversation, not just turning over a new leaf or determining to do right. We have the opportunity of a growing and developing purpose,

direction, attitude and behaviour. As we grow in our relationship with God we no longer seek to serve ourselves but are bearing fruit for God. Those quotes from the Christmas Tree Festival confirm how integral God's word is to that deepening relationship. And in our passage this morning we are given a glimpse of great passion which declares in a nut shell that God's word...

- Makes us wise –a wisdom that goes beyond amassing knowledge; It is a wisdom that comes from allowing what God teaches to literally guide us through life.

This passage is about the word of God. In whatever form that word was known to the psalmist, it has come to us today in the form of Scripture, and it offers us something of the practical use and value. These eight verses explain five things the word of God does for the people of God. I'm going to very simply and briefly run us through each them.

First, if we allow it God's word delights us: How I love you law (97) and How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (103). CS Lewis said: As Christians we increasingly live on a spiritual island; new and rival ways of life surround it in all directions and their tides come further up the beach every time.' We need to value all the more a satisfying biblical ethic.

Secondly the Psalmist demonstrates how God's word (if we allow it to) will accompany us constantly. Look at verse 98 again: Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. Of course to mediate on it all day long the Psalmist needed to know it. That suggests learning it – personally I find that really hard because my memory is so rubbish! However, a few years ago this church under the directorship of Sarah Witts put on a production of Jesus' Passion, it was called 'To Jerusalem' – I played the part of Thomas, the doubting disciple and knowing I was going to have to perform in front of an audience meant I really did have to learn my words. There are no neat short cuts – I find it really difficult remembering things but to learn God's word (hard as that sometimes may be) its crucial to keep reading it and mediating on in order to be able to say of God's words **They are always with me.**

Thirdly, this short passage shows how God's word "equips us" v 98-100 say: Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. A chap called Thomas Manton said 'Enemies excel in policy, teachers in doctrine, and ancients in counsel,' He was explaining that the ordinary believer who knows the word of God is better equipped than clever, learned, or experienced people who do not. Mediating on God's word equips us. As we heard earlier: It is as vital as food. It feeds me spiritually, physically and emotionally as well as providing guidance, comfort and wisdom. It is a necessity, not an option.

Fourthly God's word directs His people. Here as elsewhere, the Bible's teaching on guidance has far less to do with signs and pointers than simply being right with God, and keeping it that way. To help bring that out let me read verse 101 and then verse 104: Verse 101: I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. Verse 104: I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. The sense of verse 104 is established by the parallel verse 101: *understanding* has to do with obedience, not brains; the *wrong path* is *the evil path*, not simply the incorrect one.

Finally, this passage shows how God's word puts us in touch with God himself. The Psalmist is in no danger of worshipping the book rather than the Lord of the book. In verse 102 he recognises that whatever he has learnt from God's law, it is God himself who has been teaching him. Verse 102 I have not departed from your laws, for **you yourself have taught me.**

God's word – it delights us, it accompanies us, it equips us, it directs us, it puts us in touch with God. *The word of God* is no mere label to attach to a book; it means God speaking. But as I begin to finish there is a danger that what we've discussed this morning may leave us feeling guilty. Please don't get me wrong I'm not trying to suggest we meditate on God's teaching to the exclusion of anything else. If we did we'd probably would not be able to support ourselves, much less our families, and, if we did the meditation in seclusion, we would never come into contact with anyone else and not be able to share with them God's love based on His teaching. But whilst we may not be reading the bible 24/7 we can be striving to apply it to our daily lives.

So 'Yes' – it is important to have a time of devotion every day and read our bible and then go about our business – whatever that may be. To read it every day is crucial because it enables to reflect on what we've read and pray at various times throughout the day, and over time through God's grace and the power of His Spirit we actually find ourselves applying God's word more and more.

However, there is no real short cut – basically the more we discipline ourselves to mediate on God's word the more we will love it and the more we will apply it to our life – it is the classic 'work in progress'. And what is the motivation for this...well...as followers of Christ we are cleansed and made holy through believing and obeying the word of God. We are already accepted and forgiven through Christ's sacrificial death. But daily application of God's word has a purifying effect on our minds and hearts. Scripture points out sin, motivates us to confess, renews our relationship with Christ, and guides us back to the right path.

Hebrews 4:12 says: For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The word of God is not simply a collection of words from God, a vehicle for communicating ideas; it is living, life-changing and dynamic as it works in us. God's word reveals who we are and what we are not. It penetrates the core of our moral and spiritual life. It discerns what is within us, both good and evil. The demands of God's word require decisions. We must not only listen to the word; we must also let it shape our lives. And as it does we grow deeper into a relationship with God and He desire's and delights to have fellowship with us. Yes – we will always sense and realise that we can't live up to his standards. But also accept that he loves us just the way we are regardless of our faults. So in closing some questions for us to ponder:

1. Do you love to read and meditate on the Word of God?
2. Do you practically apply God's Word to your everyday life?
3. Do you discuss God's Word often?

I struggle with these questions and I guess probably most of us do. I have no neat answers but here are some suggestions.

- Maybe look at some of the different bible notes out in the welcome area
- Set aside a time each day for reading God's word and try to keep to it
- Join a home-group, talk to others and share experiences
- Pray and ask God to guide you.

This morning we've glimpsed eight wonderful verses from Psalm 119 of the Old Testament but remember we are in the privileged position of being New Testament Christians and therefore The Psalmist would not have heard these words that are so familiar to us: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This of course comes from John's Gospel where John speaks of Jesus – a human he knew and loved, but at the same time the Creator of the universe, and the ultimate revelation of God, the living picture of God's holiness, the One in whom 'all things hold together'. This new understanding of the Word was gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Scripture is alive and powerful and it is useful to teach, correct, and instruct us. God's Word never returns empty and sometimes it is not until later that God's **words** come to mind as we need them. The Holy Spirit uses the truths we've stored from reading or memorization, and He helps us to apply them at just the right time. The more we read and contemplate God's Word the more His Spirit can remind us and we can subsequently apply scripture in our lives. Reading the Bible turns our minds into storehouses through which the Spirit can work. As we learn to love God's Word more and more it teaches us and helps us so we can live it out, be encouraged by it, and help others to know it too.

On the morning of my Ordination last Sunday I read these words from my bible notes for that day. They said: Neglecting the Word will famish your soul; meditating on the Word will feed it. I then walked into breakfast and found that another Ordinand had given me a present. It was this – It is

verse 105 – the next verse following our reading today – it says: Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

It says it all really. Lets Pray...