



The Word: Storehouse of Knowledge and Wisdom Psalm 119:97-104

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September 4, 2010 — Trinity 14

In the last stanza of Psalm 119 we saw David praising the Word of God because it is everlasting, unchanging, and infinite. As David said, it's as infinite and as everlasting as the heavens and as strong and permanent as the foundations of the earth. We saw David making the connection between the Word by whom God created the cosmos and the Word of God written: his commandments, his precepts, his judgements. The Word embodies God's creative power—to create life in the beginning and to give it new life after it rejected the Creator and fell into sin. David had the experience of the best of everything on earth. He was rich and powerful. He was a great king. If anyone had experienced the "perfection" of man's world and creation it was David, and yet in comparison to the Word of God, all the things of man's world were as nothing.

These realisations of David now lead us into the thirteenth stanza: verses 97 to 104. David starts this stanza in verse 97 with an exclamation, and it's an exclamation that makes perfect sense in light of the everlasting and infinite glories of the Word he's just been sing about. He writes—or rather, since this is a *psalm*, he sings:

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

How often do we express sentiments like that to God? When was the last time you told God that you loved his law, his commandments, his precepts, his Word? How often do we do it out loud so that others hear it? Maybe we sing something like this in church because it's part of the programme, but how often is this sort of statement the spontaneous result of our knowledge of and reflection on God's Word?

In the early Nineties I spent a year at the University of Mississippi and while I was there, attended the same church as John

Grisham, the famous author. People would walk up to him, even in church, just to tell him how much they *loved* his latest novel. When you watch interviews with movie stars, it's not uncommon to hear them talking about people walking up to them and saying things like, "I *loved* you in that movie!" And yet how often do we look up from our Bibles as we've been reading them and tell God, "I *love* your Word"? How often do we meditate on or memorise a passage of Scripture and are moved to praise God for the life-giving power of his Word?

The real test may be how we respond to the Word of God when it tells us things we don't want to hear or when it shows our sins. True love for God's Word doesn't pick and choose. True love for God's Word doesn't ignore certain parts. True love for God's Word doesn't try to reason its way out of obedience to the whole. There are people out there who call themselves "Red Letter Christians," meaning they only follow the words of Christ in the Gospels—the ones printed in red in some Bibles. They argue that the words of the Epistles are just the opinions of men. They argue that the Old Testament doesn't apply anymore. And yet David pointed us last week to the fact that it was the same Word who created the cosmos that is embodied in the Word and Jesus tells us that he himself is that same Word of God, now incarnate in human flesh. Every jot, every tittle is precious and points us to God and teaches us how to walk in his ways—even the parts that convict and shame us.

David reminds us that love of the law, of the Word, should draw us to it. If you're married, does your love of your husband or your wife not make you desire to spend time with him or her? To know him or her? To be one with him or her? David's love for the Word drew him into a close relationship with it. He says that it's his meditation throughout the day. The Word was his treasure. He didn't just read it and set it aside. He wrote in verse 11: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." He studied and meditated on it so that it was stored in his heart—so that it would not only form his character and his actions, but that it would be there when it wasn't available to him in written form. Once it was in his heart, he could call it to mind any time he wanted to. What we store in our hearts reflects what we love.

One time a friend commented on the fact that I could remember so many lines from my favourite TV shows, movies, and books. He said, "If you remember so many things from TV and books, you must know an awful lot of the Bible by heart too." I'm pretty sure my face turned beet-red when he said that, because the fact was that I didn't really have very much of the Scriptures stored up in my heart at that time. It was mostly TV shows, movies, and books. I was reminded of one passage I did have memorised: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

David's love for the law and his daily meditation on it show us something else, and that's that his love is rooted in his redemption. Think about this especially in terms of the Old Testament law—the part of the Bible from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Genesis and the first half of Exodus tell the history of God's people from Creation through their exodus from Egypt. That makes for exciting reading, but the rest of Exodus through Deuteronomy is mostly a record of God's law—his rules for his people. Those first five books were the only Bible David had. That's the part of the Bible that is taken up mostly with the condemnation of our sins and regulations for worship. You can't read the law without having all your flaws and shortcomings pointed out to you. It's a searchlight on our souls. Lots of non-Christians praise the teachings of Jesus (or at least what they think are the teachings of Jesus), but it's the law they don't want to hear. You could stand on a street corner and read the Sermon on the Mount all day long and probably not cause a stir, but stand there and read from the law and people will get upset—because it condemns our sins. It reminds us that we aren't as good as we think we are. It reminds us just how far even the best of us is from God's holy standard.

And yet David loved it. Why? Because he had experienced saving grace and had been reconciled to God. He no longer stood condemned by the law. It had become to him, as St. James calls it, a "law of liberty." Having experienced the steadfast love and mercy of God, he wanted nothing more than to serve God in return and the law was, as we'll see him write in next week's stanza, the light to his path as he sought to walk in God's ways. Brothers and sisters, we need to ask ourselves if we have the same kind of love

for the Word of God as David did. If you don't, ask God to plant a deeper desire for him and his Word in your heart. Ask for the grace to study and meditate on it daily and know that the indwelling Holy Spirit will give you understanding and help you apply it in your life. As you do that, the changes that the Word makes in your life will lead to greater love. And of course, greater love will lead to more study and more meditation, which again leads to even greater love.

And friends, love for God's Word doesn't come back void. Look at what David has to say in the next three verses (vv. 98-100). The Word taught him and made him wise. He compares himself to his enemies, to his teachers, and to those with experience of age. Now he doesn't do this to brag about his own accomplishments, but he tells us these things, first, to give God praise for the greatness of his Word, but also to encourage the rest of us to love the Word as much as he does. Look first at verse 98:

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.

Our worldly enemies may have all sorts of worldly knowledge and power and cunning, but they lack God. Ask yourself: Who has really secured his future: The man who has spent his time storing up earthly treasure and who depends on earthly things, or the man who has God for his friend? The man who is guided by the world, the flesh, and the devil; or the man who is guided by the Spirit of God? The man who not only forsakes God, but wilfully rebels against him; or the man who has made it his life's priority to walk step by step with God. Brothers and sisters, as God's sons and daughters our security lies in two things: First, in that God is our friend, and second, in the knowledge that as long as God has work for us to do, he will equip us for that work and sustain us as we do it. David knew this because God's Word was always with him. Matthew Henry wrote, "A good man, wherever he goes, carries his Bible with him, if not in his hands, yet in his head and in his heart."

David goes on:

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

There's no doubt that David was surrounded by incredibly knowledgeable and godly teachers, and yet he could praise God that he had even more understanding than they did. It's not an uncommon thing that a student in the faith grows beyond his teacher, even though his teacher is steeped in godly grace and wisdom. Think of Ambrose and Augustine. Ambrose was an amazing godly man and one who was mature and wise in the faith. He was Augustine's teacher and mentor, and yet Augustine's understanding of the things of God eventually grew far beyond that of Ambrose. It's a lesson to us that no matter whom God uses as a teacher, God himself is the one who gives the knowledge and understanding. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of his ways aren't like worldly wisdom. They're a gracious gift of God. And David received bountifully from God, because he devoted himself to diligently study the Word. As he says here, he made God's testimonies the object of his meditation. He spent his days and nights pondering and thinking on them.

His devotion to the Word made him wiser than his enemies, gave him more understanding than his teachers, but it went beyond that. Look at verse 100:

I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

He had more understanding than his elders—than the men who had learned much from all the experiences of life. Life teaches. You can ignore every other teacher in the world, but even the most obstinate student will eventually learn his lessons in the school of hard knocks. Even if we do listen to our earthly teachers and pay attention to life, the experience of age is only going to get us so far. David had these earthly teachers, but he also, through the Holy Spirit inspired Word, had the Ancient of Days as his teacher. Consider all the things you can learn by submitting yourself to the teaching of your earthly elders, but then compare that to what you can learn from our Creator who has existed from eternity past and who is all-powerful and all-knowing. As we saw in the previous stanza, God's Word is everlasting, unchanging, and infinite in its perfection. There is no other teacher like it.

But David also teaches us something important in this verse. How did he receive such great understanding? He says, "for I keep your precepts." He learned by doing. This is an amazingly important kingdom principle that every one of us needs to grasp. Knowledge of God, fellowship with him, and understanding of his ways come as we follow and obey him. Our natural tendency as fallen and sinful creates is to reject him. Even after the Spirit regenerates our hearts, we still struggle with obedience—we still choose to sin sometimes. And yet the more we choose to sin instead of to obey, the more we will push ourselves from God and hinder the renewing and sanctifying work of the Spirit in our lives. David had understanding because he kept God's precepts. Jesus teaches this principle: "If anyone chooses to *do* God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17 NIV). Jesus also told his disciples, "Whoever has my commandments and *keeps* them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and *manifest* myself to him" (John 14:21). Obedience is a choice and the more we choose it, God promises the better we will know him and know his ways. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote: "Wouldst thou be divine? Do the commandments; for action is the basis of contemplation." In other words, godliness doesn't come from thinking about being godly. No. Godliness comes from *obeying* the commandments of God. Do you have a hard time loving your enemies? Then start praying for them and start doing loving things for them. As anyone who's been married knows, feelings of love are strengthened by acts of love, and when feelings of love aren't there, they come when we choose to act in love. If you want godly understanding, David reminds us of this important principle: obey God.

These three verses are full of hope for our spiritual growth and maturity. We all have times when we feel like we're not growing. David reminds us to steep ourselves in God's Word: store it away so that you always have it with you; meditate on it; and finally obey it—*do what it says*. Devote yourself to the Word. Martin Luther wrote that we should treat it like a fruit tree. Shake it until some piece of

fruit falls down to us. If it doesn't happen right away, move onto another branch—another passage—and keep shaking. He says, "If your soul really hungers, the Spirit of God will not send you away empty. You shall at length find...such an abundance of fruit, that you will gladly seat yourself under its shade, and abide there, as under a tree laden with fruit."

We get an even better idea of just how serious David was about following God's ways in verses 101 and 102:

I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.

He knew that to walk according to the Word was the key to walking with God and knowing him better and so he says that he held his feet back from walking in evil ways. The word he uses when he says "hold back" is a word that means to shut-up or to restrain the way a prisoner is shut-up or restrained. David didn't just casually try to stay out of the path of evil and sin. No, he guarded himself the way a prison guard guards a prisoner. He knew that his heart was naturally inclined to evil and that it was only the grace of God that had given him a desire to walk in righteousness, and so he actively and diligently guarded himself from sin. He made sure his feet didn't walk down that path. In verse 102 he says, "I do not turn aside from your rules." He knew the right path because, as he says, God had taught him.

Now, does that mean David was perfect? Not at all. David still stumbled and fell. He committed some serious sins, like adultery and murder. And yet what's amazing is that God himself called David a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22). Granted this was before David committed those two sins, but God knew that despite momentary failings, David's heart was focused on him. The key is not perfection. None of us will ever achieve that on this side of eternity. The key lies in the desires of our hearts. David's whole heart desired God and to follow him. Even when he stumbled into serious sin, it was due to a temporary lapse. His desire all along was still for God. It's a wake-up call to us. Most of us have never committed what we think of as "big" sins, like David did, and yet if we

examine our lives and especially our hearts; if we look in ourselves and ask what our passions and desires are set on, are we truly men and women after God's own heart? Is our overwhelming desire to seek after God and his kingdom and to follow his Word and walk in his ways? Do we overwhelmingly trust in him to take care of us, or are we devoting ourselves to laying up treasures on earth, as if this life is all that matters? Can we honestly say, as David does in verse 103:

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Are God's words like honey in your mouth? There are times, especially times when I'm pouring over Scripture and it's inspiring me and my hands can't stop writing down or my fingers can't stop typing the truths and the applications that the Holy Spirit is bringing to mind, when the Word is amazingly sweet. There are times when I can't stop thinking about the truth or application of some Scripture that I read earlier in the day—it's sweet. And yet there are other times when I read the Word as if I'm just putting in my time and doing my duty. Nothing falls from the tree. I don't stop to shake it some more; I just walk away. There are times when I'd rather have a mouthful of the passing sweetness of honey than the eternal sweetness of the Word of God. And I think that all of us are like this to lesser and greater degrees. We lose our eternal perspective and we forget where our true loyalties lie, whom we serve, and the source of all real blessing. David reminds us in verse 104:

Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

The knowledge of God comes from his precepts—from his Word. The natural man or woman hates God and loves sin, but David reminds us here that the redeemed man, because of the change made in his heart by the work of the Holy Spirit, now loves God and hates sin. Consider how much you once loved sin—maybe even how you still love and hold onto certain sins in your life. Each of us at one time held onto sin with a warm and loving embrace, and in doing so we demonstrated out hatred for God. We committed cosmic treason against our Creator. With every sin we committed,

we stabbed at his loving heart. And yet now all that has changed. If the Spirit is within you and you are cooperating with the grace of God in your life, your affections have made a 180° turn. Now you love God and hate sin. And yet think about that. Do you love God with at least as much passion as you once loved your sinning? Do you hate sin with the same murderous passion that you once hated God? My guess would be that for many of us, our love for God is only half-hearted compared to our former love of sin and our hatred of sin isn't nearly as strong as our hatred of God once was.

Brothers and sisters, to be effective for God in this life, to make an impact for his kingdom, and to walk in his blessing means that we have to have a real passion for him and for his Word. We truly do need to *hate* every false way. We truly do need to *love* his Word. It should be sweeter than honey in our mouths. And the evidence that it is that sweet to us is that we meditate on it, we know it, we walk according to it, and we passionately share it with others. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." And if we love him and if we desire to keep his commandments, then we ought to have a great desire for his Word—the very place where he gives us those commandments and teaches how to follow him. Going back to verse 97, David began with praise: "O how I love your law!" Can we say that ourselves? And if we can, would others know it from the way we live our lives?

Please pray with me: Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for it's infinite and unchanging perfection. Remind us each day, we ask, that it's your Word that is our storehouse of true wisdom and knowledge and understanding and that life comes from your Word. Continue the work of regeneration and renewal in our hearts—continue to turn them to you—and give us the grace to give up the things of the world, that we might look for our security and our life in you, trusting you more and more every day as our Lord and Saviour and seeking to follow your ways by daily steeping ourselves in the Scriptures you have given us. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.