

WISE AND UPRIGHT

Text: Psalm 119:97-104

Readings: Deut 4:1-24; Psalm 34

Theme: Meditating on God's Word gave the psalmist great wisdom and guided him in the right path.

Purpose: To encourage you to read and meditate on God's Word so you may grow in wisdom and stay on the right path.

Australian research found that "if pastors could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ... they would inspire, encourage and equip their people to read the Bible – specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives."

Most pastors would heartily agree with this. This is one of the spiritual disciplines pastors encourage Christians to practice, that is, to read your Bible for yourself, to meditate on it and to apply it to your life. This is the theme of this part of Psalm 119 and so of this sermon.

The opening line of this *Mem* stanza begins enthusiastically; "Oh, how I love your law!" This is a great theme of this entire psalm - his profound appreciation for the law and commands and precepts of God. This is the first time he expresses it like this; he loved God's law! (cf v 113, 127)

Spurgeon notes that the better you get to know some people the less you admire them; not so with the word of God! The better we get to know God's word the more we admire it and the more we love it!

The psalmist loved it so much that he wrote; "I meditate on it all day long." This is also a theme of this great psalm, a theme that is introduced in the first psalm of the psalter, about the blessed man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." We'll come back to this later on.

This *Mem* section emphasises the importance of knowing and meditating on God's word.

If you do, there are two wonderful benefits:

1. This will give you great wisdom
2. And it will guide you right living

1. It will give you **GREAT WISDOM**

a. Verses 98 to 100 list a series of **three contrasts** regarding wisdom. Each verse is almost identical in its structure and grammar.

i. First he says, "Your commands make me wiser than my enemies" (v 98).

True wisdom comes from knowing and fearing God. Biblical wisdom always has a practical focus; it is what you *know* lived out in what you *do*; it is the skill of godly living.

When you live in obedience to God's commands you are living as a wise person and this puts you in a good position compared to your enemies.

The enemies of God are always trying to trip you up and looking to find fault with you; they did that to Jesus and they will do that to you. Unbelievers around you are always watching to see if they can pick holes in your faith and life.

But when you live a holy life they won't have anything bad to say about you, they can't pin anything on you. Living a godly life will minimise the gossip and slander of unbelievers.

We see this in Jesus. His enemies could not accuse him of any wrong. When he was tried by the Sanhedrin many false witnesses came forward but they could not agree on a charge against him.

ii. Second the psalmist says, "I have more insight than all my teachers" (v 99).

When you are at school, at uni and at polytech you can learn a lot from your teachers, especially if they too are Christians.

But if you know and believe God's word you will know even more than your teachers, because the Bible is the source of all true insight and is the base for all real knowledge.

This is not a reason to neglect other learning and reading but it is certainly a reason to read and study the Bible!

We see this clearly in the Lord Jesus when he was only 12 years old and discussed the law of God with the Jewish teachers in the temple; "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:46f).

iii. Third the psalmist says, "I have more understanding than the elders" (v 100).

It seems that the person writing this psalm was comparatively young. In verse 9 he asked, "How can a young man keep himself pure?" He may have asked this in relation to himself, as well as others. Here he claims that his knowledge of God's precepts, and that he obeyed them, gave him more understanding than those who were much older than him.

The elderly have learnt a lot because of their life experience; they have been around a long time and picked up a lot of information by close observation. But this man knew that what he lacked in age he made up for in his familiarity with God's word; this more than compensated for his youth and inexperience.

These three contrasts emphasise that wisdom, insight and understanding comes from God's law.

b. But let's also consider the second part of each of these three verses in which he explains **three requirements for wisdom**.

In these three there is a progression: "they are ever with me", "I meditate on your statutes", and "I obey your precepts".

i. In verse 98b he says, "***they are ever with me.***"

In those days anything that was written down was recorded on large scrolls. They were not easy to carry around, not like our small printed Bibles today. So he probably did *not* mean that he had these large scrolls with him all the time.

Rather he meant he had God's commands in his mind and on his heart. In verse 11 he wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." This means that he had heard it, read it, and memorised it.

It was so familiar to him that he had it in his mind; it was always with him.

Can you say that? Is this true of you? Do you listen carefully to the word of God when it is read at home and when it is read and preached in worship, or do you switch off?

Have you memorised verses and passages from the Bible? The children in Sunday School are doing this, which is great, but as adults we need to be doing this as well. Write verses out on little cards and carry them with you and refer to them often so you have them in your mind; then you too can say about God's commands, "they are ever with me."

ii. In verse 99b he says, "***I meditate on your statutes.***" In verse 97b he said about God's law, "I meditate on it all day long."

To meditate on God's word you first need to *read it and know it*.

Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation in Germany in 1517. He believed that everyone should be able to read the Bible in their own language and so he translated it into German. When you read the Bible, he said, you need to pause at any verse, as if you stopped under a fruit tree, and shake that branch, that verse, so that some fruit drops down for you to feed on.

You have the Bible in English. In order to know the Bible you need to read it each day. Read it systematically, book by book. When you read don't be in too much of a hurry or you won't get much out of it. It is easy to read the narratives in long sections but there are other parts of the Bible to read slowly, prayerfully and carefully. Try to understand what you are reading and apply it to yourself.

And then *meditate* on what you have read. Take it with you through the day. Carry it with you in your head. Think about it, turn it over in your mind, ponder it, pray about it.

It is hard to do this in our modern world because there is so much going on around us, so much to distract us. Many people never have any silence in their lives; they always have something on, something they are listening to at home and in the car – the TV, the radio, their ipod, their phone. If you are going to meditate on God's word you need some silence, you need to pull out those earpieces, take off the headphones, turn off the radio, unplug the TV, so you have some time to think about God and his truth.

iii. Do this so you can apply it to your own life. This is the point of verse 100b which reads, "***I obey your precepts.***" This introduces the second part of this section.

2. If you read and study and meditate on God's word it will give you great wisdom, and secondly, it will guide you in **RIGHT LIVING**

a. His desire to obey God was **detailed and particular**. Verse 101 – "I have kept my feet from every evil path", and verse 104 – "...I hate every wrong path."

He wanted to obey God and he was determined to avoid any side road or detour.

He wanted to obey God in everything he did. Sometimes we think near enough is good enough; as long as we aren't too far off the mark then we are doing okay. But small sins usually lead to bigger sins; little lies lead to large lies; minor deception leads to major deception; indulging in pornography can lead you to adultery.

Are you being careful in small matters? Are you guarding against compromise in any and every area? Are you seeking to apply God's law at school, at home and at work? Are you seeking to follow God's law in your speech and your actions, in your behaviour and relationships?

Or are you giving in to temptation? Have you become slack in obedience? Have you already started to drift off the right path?

If so, you need the resolution of this man - "I have kept my feet from every evil path...I hate every wrong path."

b. His desire to obey God was **motivated by God himself**. Verse 101 – "I have not departed from your laws because you yourself have taught me."

He did not merely love God's law but he loved God himself; he did not only respect God's commands but even more the God who gave them. God's law comes from God; "...you yourself have taught me." The repetition in the Hebrew text is used for emphasis.

We do not worship this book, the Bible; rather we worship the *author* of this book, God himself. We do not worship God's laws but rather the God who gave us these laws.

This is even clearer for us as New Testament believers because Jesus has come and we have come to know God through him, and Jesus has expanded and amplified and applied God's law for us.

And our motive for obedience is even more pressing for us as Christians because Jesus died on the cross so that we might love him and live for him. The strongest, most compelling motive for

obedience is the suffering and death of Jesus. He gave himself up for us, he laid down his life for our sake; so we owe him everything – our obedience, love and service!

c. Because God himself has taught him he wrote, **“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth”** (v 103).

Children, I’m sure many of you have read the books about Winnie the Pooh, or seen the DVDs, and you’ll remember that he loved honey! Pooh Bear and his honey jar! Many of us love honey as well – it is sweet to taste.

The man who wrote this psalm compared his reading of the law to eating honey – God’s words were sweet to his taste, even sweeter than honey!

In psalm 19 David wrote that God’s laws “are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb!” (v 10b). The prophet Jeremiah wrote, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my hearts delight” (Jer 15:16). In Psalm 34 David wrote, “Taste and see that the Lord is good!” (v 8). God is good and his word to us in the Bible is sweeter than honey.

If you have tasted something delicious then you will commend it to others. You’ll say, “You should try this! You’ll like it! It is delicious! Go on, have a bite!”

In the same way, those of us who have tasted that the Lord is good will want others to taste God and his word.

Catherine Hankey wanted to do this and wrote these words;

“I love to tell the story;
this pleasant to repeat
What seems each time I tell it,
More wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story,
For some have never heard
The message of salvation
From God’s own holy Word.”

Another hymn says,

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds and drives away his fear.”

The Bible is God’s message about the Lord Jesus Christ; this is why it is so good to read. If you read it and meditate on it and apply it to your life you will come to know Jesus and you will grow in wisdom and you will stay on the right path.

Amen