

GOD'S WONDERFUL WORD!

Text: Psalm 119:129-136

Readings: Luke 19:41-48; Matt 23:29-39

Theme: The psalmist expresses his thanks for God's laws and his prayer for God's grace and guidance.

Purpose: To encourage you to be thankful for God's Word and urge you to pray for his grace and guidance.

Sometimes you do or experience something and you enjoy it so much that you want more of it. You watch a great movie which had a positive and encouraging message and you want to see it again. You read an excellent book which was interesting and very well written and you want to read it a second time.

You enjoy a delicious dessert and it was so good you desire a second helping!

The man who wrote this psalm had this experience as he read God's word; the laws of God were so wonderful that he longed to know them better, to understand them more fully and to put them into practice in his life.

In the middle part of this long psalm he described his troubles and trials and prayed to God about the severe oppression he was experiencing from his enemies. That theme is still here in this section (v 134, 136), but it begins to fade into the background as he comes towards the end of his reflections on God's law.

Here his tone is more positive. He opens this section by expressing his thankfulness for God's laws and then goes on to make a few specific requests about these laws. All of what he says he applies very directly to us.

1. HIS THANKFULNESS FOR GOD'S LAWS

a. He was thankful because God's laws were **wonderful!**

i. Not everyone, of course, shares this enthusiasm for God's word. Most non-Christians today think of the Bible as a book of fables and legends. They disregard it is historically and scientifically inaccurate. They despise it as antiquated and completely irrelevant for today.

But Christians love, revere and respect the Bible as the Word of God. We appreciate it and treasure it. We agree with the writers of the Westminster Confession when they wrote about the Bible and noted "the heavenliness of the matter, ...the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation" (WCF 1,5).

We agree with Spurgeon who wrote that God's laws are "wonderful in their effects as instructing, elevating, strengthening and comforting the soul... Those who know them best wonder at them most." We can describe at length the wonders of God's word and "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom 11:33).

But the most wonderful thing about the Bible is the description it gives of "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph 5:18). The wonderful statutes of God point us to our "Wonderful Counsellor", who is the Lord Jesus Christ, prophesied about by Isaiah in the Old Testament and fully revealed in the new! (Is 9:6)

Is the Word of God wonderful to you? Are you amazed as you read all the words and deeds of God in Christ in this book? Do you marvel at God's Wonderful Counsellor, the Lord Jesus? Can you say with the psalmist, "Your statutes are wonderful"?

ii. If so, then you also need to say the parallel line, "*Therefore I obey them.*"

Some people are happy to speculate about God's words, or are happy to talk about them with others, and have long and deep theological discussions about these wonders.

But the psalmist wondered at God's laws and *obeyed them!* He put them into practice.

If you appreciate God's word then you must apply it in your life.

If you believe the Bible you must act on it.

If you love this Wonderful Counsellor then you must obey his commands, otherwise all your wondering at God's word is merely intellectual enjoyment or emotional feelings. Are you obeying God's commands?

b. He was thankful because God's laws were *gave light!*

Verse 130; "The unfolding of your words gives light."

The Hebrew word translated as "unfolding" literally means an opening. After his resurrection Jesus spoke to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. Later on they asked each other; "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

Today, as we read God's word, Jesus opens or unfolds the Bible to us through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit shines his light in our minds, and enables us to understand what he has written. Every time you read your Bible you need to pray for this illumination, this light, this opening of God's word.

The psalmist goes on to say that the opening of God's words "gives *understanding to the simple*" (v 130b).

The word "simple" describes people who are childlike in their understanding, or immature in their judgment. They are people who are inexperienced and easily led.

If such people are willing to learn then the word of God can give them a great "understanding" of God and of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

To be a Christian you do not need to be highly intelligent, nor do you need to be well educated, nor do you need to be old. God's word can give light and understanding to those who are young.

All of you who are children can understand the Bible, and a good part of the sermons you hear, if you listen carefully, and want to hear and understand.

c. God's laws are wonderful and they give us light and understanding. This is why the psalmist *longed for God's commands.* Verse 131; "I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.

Children, you've all seen a dog running around playing with you, or chasing a ball or running after sticks. After a while the dog is panting because of all his exercise!

If *you* run fast for a long time then you too will pant; you can't take in enough air through your nose so you open your mouth and pant, taking in as much air as you can.

The writer of this psalm said that he panted for God's commands. He longed for them and wanted to take them in. In Psalm 42 we read; "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you O Lord. My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God" (v 1f).

It is to our shame that these words do not usually describe our experience. We do not hunger for God's word, we are not eager to read it.. Too often our Bible's gather dust from one Sunday to the next, lying on the shelf unopened and unread.

Nor do we thirst for God as the psalm describes. We long for a good coffee, for a solid night's rest, for a holiday, for a pay rise, but we do not long for God.

2. So it is fitting that we go from expressing our thankfulness for God's laws to consider our **PRAYERS ABOUT GOD'S LAWS** (v 132-135).

The psalmist has four petitions which we will consider briefly.

a. He prayed for **God's grace**.

Verse 132: "Turn to me and have mercy on me."

i. If God turned to you and me and focused on our sins then we would be punished for those because we always fall far short of God's commands and laws.

This man was aware of his own sins and so he prayed that God would be gracious to him, have mercy on him.

He wanted God to forgive him. He was not thinking of other people but of himself and his own need of forgiveness. Twice he mentions "me"; "Turn to *me* and have mercy on *me*." You and I need to pray this prayer, and we need to pray it for ourselves, every day.

ii. We can pray this with confidence because of the second line of his prayer, "...as you always do to those who love your name." Literally the phrase reads, "as is your manner".

This man knew that God had been merciful and forgiving to his people in the past and he prayed that God would continue to do this.

And we know this from our own reading of the Bible and from our own experience of God's forgiveness of our sins. Keep praying for God's grace through Christ.

b. Pray for God's **guidance**. Verse 133; "Direct my footsteps according to your word..."

i. Often we feel a bit confused and lost in our lives; we are unsure about how to raise our children, what job to take, how to best use our time, whether to move house or not, how to relate to our family and our friends.

Often we feel that our lives are too busy and too complicated and that we have too many irons in the fire and that there are too many decisions to make!

With so much going on and with so many decisions to make we need to pray, "Direct my footsteps according to your word..." The ESV reads, "Keep my steps steady..."

We need to pray, as Spurgeon wrote, "that every distinct act, every step, might be arranged and governed by the will of God." We need to put our lives in his hands and ask him to lead us by his word and Spirit. We need to ask him to help us live in obedience to his commands.

ii. Having begun with the positive the psalmist then went to the negative; "Let no sin rule over me." Most of us are troubled with particular sins that continue to tempt us, that dog our steps and hinder our spiritual progress. Too often we get used to these and accept them; we learn to live with them and they don't bother us as they ought to. We too need to pray this prayer, pleading for the work of God's Spirit within us; "Let no sin rule over me."

c. Pray for God's grace, for his guidance, and third, pray for his **redemption**.

Verse 134; "Redeem me from the oppression of men, that I may obey your precepts."

Many Christians find themselves hindered from obeying God's laws because of a situation of oppression.

A Christian wife is married to an unbelieving husband.

A young Christian is under the authority of unbelieving parents.

A Christian employee is working for a non-Christian boss. A Christian citizen is living in a country that has an oppressive Muslim government and he cannot meet other Christians for worship or Bible studies.

In all these situations we may pray for deliverance, asking that God may redeem us so that we may obey his precepts.

d. Finally pray for God's **favour**.

Verse 135; "Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees." This reminds us of the blessing in Numbers 6; "The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you" (v 25).

To ask for God's face to shine on you is to pray for God's favour, for his love, his kindness, his

goodness. This is a contrast to the previous verse. Oppressors frown at Christians so they live under a dark cloud; rather, we want to live in the light of God's glory and grace!

And then he prayed, "**and teach me your decrees.**"

This is not an afterthought, tacked on to the end of his prayer. No, this is at the heart of this psalm; this is what this long psalm is all about – he genuinely and truly wanted to know God's commands so he could obey them. This is how he began this section; "Your statutes are wonderful, therefore I obey them."

This is why he was so grieved at the disregard many had for God's law and their open disobedience to them;

Verse 136; "Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed." The psalmist grieved and wept over the rebellion and disobedience in Israel.

The prophet Jeremiah also wept over the disobedience of Judah in his day and the judgment of God that would come on them, so much so that he is known as "the weeping prophet".

"O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears. I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jer 9:1).

"If you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly overflowing with tears" (Jer 13:17).

In the same way Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem in his day because of their unbelief and hard hearts. He had come as the promised Messiah but the Jews did not recognise him (Luke 19:41-44; Matt 23:37-39).

Today we need to do more weeping over the situation in our country.. Most of those living around us are unbelievers who are destined for an eternity in hell. Most around us are without God and without hope in this world. Most are following the false gods of this present age and love the world and give free rein to the desires of their sinful nature; as a result they face the eternal wrath of God.

In response we need to weep over our own sins and how far we fall short of God's commands, but we also need to weep over the sin and sins of our nation.

We need to point people to the wonderful statutes of God and to the light they shed on our lives.

We need to pray for God's grace and guidance, for his redemption and favour, on us and on our nation, and do this with tears.

Amen