

The Perfect and Precious Word

Psalm 19:7-11 – page 456 in the pew Bibles

[Read passage]

I'm not one who likes a lot of drama. I live in a house with four women, three of them daughters, and believe me when I say, I get plenty of drama the way it is. So, when I say what I'm about to say, I want you to know that I am not being overly dramatic.

As I was sitting down at my desk to begin preparing today's sermon, as I sat and read this passage of Scripture, I felt as if I was an ant at the foot of Mt. Everest. I sat and I gazed, as it were, at the grandeur and immensity of this passage, and quite frankly, I felt, and still feel, utterly insufficient and incompetent to even think that I can do this passage the justice that it deserves.

So, I ask that you would join me as I bow before Almighty God and ask for His grace and His help in our time of need this morning.

[Pray]

We saw last week in verses 1-6 that God reveals Himself in a general way to all humanity. We said that in the heavens we can know clearly that God exists, and we can also know a few things about the God who created them, namely His eternal power and divine nature. We also saw that the Bible tells us that this revelation is clear enough to all people throughout all of the world as to leave them without excuse.

This week we're going to be looking at verses 7-11 and what is called God's "special revelation." If, as we saw last week, general revelation tells us how God has generally revealed Himself to all people of the world, special revelation has a covenantal basis to it. What I mean by that is, it calls His human creatures to a relationship with Him. Through the special revelation of His Word (and especially through His Son, Jesus Christ), God has revealed at least four things: His name or who He is, His ways or how He does things, His will or what He expects of His creation, which includes how mankind has sinned and what the consequences are, and His plan of redemption or how He is restoring what sin has broken. You read the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation and every single bit of it falls into one or more of these categories.

So, as we turn now to our text, what we find in verses 7-9 is God telling us something very crucial about the nature of His Word.

- 1. In His Word, God has graciously revealed the standard for seeing all other things.
(vv. 7-9)**

[Read vv. 7-9]

The very first thing that I want to point out is the difference in the name by which God is called in this passage. In verses 1-6, in addressing all mankind, God is called by the general term for

God, El. But right away beginning in verse 7, we notice that God is being referred to by His revealed name, or covenant name, Yahweh. This is significant since this section is talking about God's Word, which as we said, is based on God calling His people to a covenant relationship to Himself.

It's interesting that although Yahweh is first used in Genesis 2, God did not reveal Himself as Yahweh until Exodus 3, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and said, "take the sandals off your feet, for the place in which you stand is holy ground." The ground was holy for one reason and one reason only...because God was there. And He is holy.

And this is what we see here in verses 7-9 as David describes different characteristics of God's Word, the first of which is "perfect." We see that it says that God's Word is perfect for the very reason that God Himself is perfect. It's interesting to note that we read all the way through verses 1-6 describing God's creative acts in creation in the heavens, and although it says that they speak of or declare the glory of God, they are still created things. Nowhere is the word "perfect" used until speaking of His Word, the very words of the LORD from His own breath.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul tells us that all Scripture is inspired, or "God-breathed." It was spoken from God's own mouth, and as such, His Word bears the same characteristics as God Himself. God is perfect, and thus His Word is perfect. That word "perfect" in the Hebrew, *tawmeem*, means "complete," and also carries the meaning of being morally blameless. The word is linked with ideas such as truth, virtue, uprightness, and righteousness.

Keeping in mind that the different nouns David uses in verses 7-9 such as law, precepts, testimonies, and commandments can all be understood as being the same as saying God's Word, it says that it's the "law" of the LORD that is perfect. The word "law" means "teaching" or "instruction." This reveals the will and ways of God for His creation. Like a loving Father, He teaches us, instructs us in His perfect will and way.

In Romans 12:2, Paul describes God's will as good and acceptable and perfect.

Likewise, in Psalm 18:30, David says, "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him."

And then it states the benefit of the perfect instruction of Yahweh, namely that it revives the soul, which speaks of returning, reviving, recuing, or restoring. Simply put, the teaching or instruction of the LORD doesn't just tell us how we ought to live, it restores or rescues our soul from the darkness of this sinful world and our soul's sin-sick state.

We must remember that when we think of God's Word, we cannot separate His words from God Himself. For His Words are not just words on a page written long ago to hopefully spur us on to good behavior. But words from the very mouth of God given not only to give us information about who God is, but to impart the very life of God into our souls.

Moving along we see that David makes use of Hebrew parallelism, using similar or synonymous words in succession to describe one thing, in this case the perfection of God's Word.

He says “the testimony,” or “warnings” of the LORD is sure, that is, firm, faithful, established, lasting. And it says that they make wise the simple.

I remember a time in my life that I was making decisions based on whatever my own mind thought. I lacked wisdom. I was ignorant of the Word of God and its loving warnings. Little did I know, until God graciously rescued me from the situation, that I was building my life on shifting sand with no solid foundation. When we stray from God’s perfect ways, He warns us, gives us His testimony, which, by the way, is the same word used in Scripture to describe the Ten Commandments. They reveal God’s sure standard, and call us, warn us, to come back into the safety of His teachings.

Author Leslie Flynn wrote in one of his books, “The Ten Commandments may seem narrow, but so does every runway on airports around the world. Yet no passenger wants his pilot to miss the narrow runway and land a few yards off the mark in some field or waterway or row of houses. The narrow ribbon of pavement is really the...way that leads to a safe, comfortable landing.”¹

Verse 8, “The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.” Again, we get the idea of God revealing what His standard is for rightness. God Himself is the standard. His ways are perfect and He is completely holy in all He is and all He does. And because His precepts are right, defined by God Himself who created us, then following those precepts is what brings true joy to our lives.

How many times have we heard the stories, maybe it’s even your own story, when someone insists on living their life seeking worldly pleasure, thinking that God’s Word is burdensome, a downer, prudish, and lacking any kind of fun whatsoever...only to end up ruined and devastated in the end.

Folks, we were created by God to live in right relationship with Him. To live in synch with His character and His ways. It is only then that we discover that living according to God’s ways bring us true and lasting joy in our lives. You might say, “Well, maybe that’s true for you, maybe that works for you, but that’s not how I am. That’s not me.” My friend, you were created by God just like I was. You were made in His likeness and bear His image. You were created, like all humans, to find your joy and fulfillment in Him, in a right relationship with the living God.

But our sin blinds us. It blinds us to the truth of who we are and it blinds us to the truth of who God is and what He has called us to be.

And so the passage goes on to say that “*the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*”

Have you ever come to that place where the filthiness and sliminess of your sin was simply overwhelming you? Where maybe you fell so deeply into a pit of sin and despair that you couldn’t even stand to be with yourself anymore? And deep down you wished you could just have the dirty stains in your soul washed clean?

¹ Charles R. Swindoll. *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 47.

It says, “The commandment of the LORD is pure.” And it will enlighten your eyes. When we are caught in sin and temptation, there comes a point where we simply can’t see straight. We’re blinded by our own desires for pleasure and satisfaction. The commandment of the LORD, His pure and perfect Word, opens our blind eyes and shows us the way.

Psalms 119 tells us in verse 105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” And in verse 130 it says, “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”

Verse 9, “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.”

When we look back at these descriptor words...perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true...and contrast them to the culture that we live in today, a culture that is relativistic, that frequently deals in either half-truths or all-out lies, a culture that is fragile and collapsing under its own weight of sin, a culture where leaders we once trusted end up betraying our trust and fall, we’re reminded once again of the beauty and preciousness of God’s Word.

And this brings us to our second point this morning:

**2. God’s Word should be to us our most precious, prized, and cherished possession.
(v.10)**

Starting in verse 10, speaking of all the synonyms for God’s Words that we just looked at like the law of the LORD, the testimony of the LORD, the precepts of the LORD, etc., it says of them:

*“More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.*

I often wonder if we Americans really understand what it is we hold in our hand when we hold our Bibles. It’s become so common to us. We have totally taken its presence for granted. You can go to just about any store, even Walmart, and purchase a copy of the Bible. We bring it to church with us, and at times, thinking more about where we’re going to eat, we forget to grab it and leave it at church. Maybe we don’t even realize it’s gone all week until it’s time to come to church again next Sunday and we go looking for it.

Or maybe we don’t forget it, but we bring it home and it remains unopened all week. Sitting on a book shelf or on a night stand, while we spend our time being entertained to death.

We say things like, “Well it’s just boring.” Or, “I really don’t understand it,” or, “I just don’t have time to read it.”

All the while, it never crosses our minds that we possess the very words of the Creator of the universe, the God whom we claim to love with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. These words were given to you as if He appeared before you and spoke them to you personally.

Do we even stop to realize how precious these words are?

Every so often I will run across a video on YouTube that grips my heart every time I see it. It's of a group of Chinese Christians in an underground church. A couple of suitcases are set down in the middle of the room and opened. Immediately the open suitcases are rushed by the room full of believers, each one eagerly and desperately taking out from one of the suitcases a Bible. You would have thought they had opened up a treasure chest of pure gold or precious stones.

They each take their new Bible which was translated into their language, and every single one of them stand there holding their Bible close to their face and breast, some even kissing it, all of them weeping for joy.

And do you know why they were weeping? Because they realized what they had been given. They realized the preciousness of God's eternal Word. And they cherished it. They prized it. And they said, "This is what we have needed. This is what we have needed."

The video ends by showing them each opening their Bibles and beginning to read, enraptured in wonder and gratitude for the book they held in their hands.

You see, it's not the leather, or the fancy binding, or the outward trappings that make it so precious. It's what's inside. The fact that these are the very Words of God Himself.

Jesus was in the desert being tempted by the devil. He had been fasting for 40 days and the Bible says He was hungry. More than likely, in His humanity He was probably on the verge of starvation. When you fast for that long your body is physically depleted. You're weak and sluggish. On top of all that, Jesus had to endure the evil advances of Satan as he unleashed all his trickery and cunning. Satan knew Jesus was weak and hungry, so he tempted Him. "IF you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread."

Now here's Jesus, hungry and weak, He hasn't had food for 40 days...and yet He replies to Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

God's Word is our very life bread. It's more vital to our life than even the food we eat. I love the words to the old hymn, Break Thou the Bread of Life:

Break Thou the bread of life dear Lord to me
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee Lord
My spirit pants for Thee O Living Word.

Thou art the bread of life O Lord to me

Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me
Give me to eat and live with Thee above
Teach me to love Thy truth for Thou art love.

You might say, “Well Pastor Ely, I want to love God’s Word more, how can I grow in my love for God’s Word?”

After passing through a period of skepticism, R.A. Torrey yielded to Christ and studied in Germany. He was chosen in 1889 by D.L. Moody to oversee the fledgling Moody Bible Institute, and he also served as pastor of Moody Memorial Church. Between 1902 and 1906, he traveled around the world conducting evangelistic crusades with Charles M. Alexander, and from 1912 until 1924 he served as dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola)—all of this while speaking widely at Bible conferences and writing forty books.

His energy came from pouring himself into Scripture.

One man approached him, a Dr. Congdon, complaining that he could get nothing out of his Bible study. The Scripture seemed to be dry as dust. “Please tell me how to study it so that it will mean something to me.”

“Read it,” replied Dr. Torrey.

“I do read it.”

“Read it some more.”

“How?”

“Take some book and read it twelve times a day for a month.”

“What book could I read that many times a day, working as many hours as I do?”

“Try Second Peter,” replied Torrey.

The man later said, “My wife and I read Second Peter three or four times in the morning, two or three times at noon, and two or three times at dinner. Soon I was talking Second Peter to everyone I met. It seemed as though the stars in the heavens were singing the story of Second Peter. I read Second Peter on my knees, marking passages. Teardrops mingled with the crayon colors, and I said to my wife, ‘See how I have ruined this part of my Bible.’”

“Yes,” she said, “but as the pages have been getting black, your life has been getting white.”²

Along with Psalm 19, one of the greatest places in Scripture that speaks of love for God’s Word is Psalm 119. I challenge you to spend time in this Psalm. Don’t rush through it. Set your mind to reading it slowly and devotionally each day. Linger in it. Pray it. Let the Holy Spirit impress its words upon your heart.

*¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.*

*¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.*

*¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.”*

² Robert J. Morgan. *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 64-65.

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

*165 Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.*

*166 I hope for your salvation, O Lord,
and I do your commandments.*

*167 My soul keeps your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.”*

Jesus teaches in John 6:63, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” But as He says elsewhere in John 15:10-11, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

So then the third point this morning is this:

3. Heeding God’s Word always leads to great reward. (v. 11)

Verse 11, “Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

This verse depicts for us what is to be the attitude of each follower of Christ. Notice first of all that it says that by God’s Word “your servant is warned.” This speaks of an attitude of humility and teachability. Firstly because he considers himself God’s servant. A servant waits on his master to hear his instructions. His heart is ready to do what he is commanded.

But secondly because this servant cherishes the warnings of his master. I read the Bible through each year, and recently I just got through with the prophet Jeremiah. It’s always difficult to read Jeremiah because of the tragic circumstances that Judah finds themselves in when they could have avoided it all. God loved His people, yet they continued in their unfaithfulness. So in His love, God sent to them prophets such as Jeremiah, to warn them about their sin. He knew that if they kept it up, they were heading for destruction and captivity. God’s warnings were an act of love. They were an act of covenant faithfulness to His people that went above and beyond, showing His heart of compassion and patience, and His desire for them to live in the safety of His law.

God certainly didn’t HAVE to send Jeremiah to give them warnings. He was under no obligation to warn them of the impending doom that was coming if they didn’t repent. But He loved them. And so He sent prophets to warn them. And even after they went into captivity, Jeremiah continued to warn them and to speak God’s loving words to them, saying, “I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

But the warnings to the people of Judah did no good because they didn’t heed them. What they couldn’t see because of their unbelief is that in keeping God’s Word there is great reward. Jeremiah spoke God’s promises time after time after time. God’s ways are good and right. He desires good for us and not evil. That’s why He has given us His Word.

After Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is breathed out by God, he says that it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Along with learning to love and cherish God's Word, we need to come to a place in our attitude where we love God's reproof and correction that comes through His Word.

God promises great spiritual reward and even temporal reward if we allow the Scripture to form us, to teach us, to reprove us, to correct us, and to train us in righteousness. But it takes the attitude of a servant, willing to be taught, willing to be warned concerning our sin, and willing to embrace His words and be changed by them, and walk them out in obedience.

Psalm 119:33-34

*Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.*

³⁴ *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.*

Proverbs 4:20-22 sums it up well for us.

*“My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.*

²¹ *Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.*

²² *For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.”*

I would be woefully remiss as a pastor if I ended this message without pointing out, that as much as it is true that we have been created to live in right relationship with God, and as important as it is for us to remember that keeping His Word is what brings us true joy, the fact of the matter is, like Israel and Judah in Jeremiah's day, we are all sinful and broken. And seeing God's law only serves to remind us that our sinful state into which all of us have been born only means that without Christ, we have absolutely no chance of keeping it.

But God's Word, His perfect and precious eternal Word, also reveals to us, that God's plan all along was to redeem a people for Himself, to rescue them from their sin, and provide satisfaction for His own justice which turns away His wrath... And so He promised in Jeremiah 31 verses 31-34, ³¹ *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers... my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

That's what Jesus accomplished 2,000 years ago, and that's what He has made available to you today. John 1:12 says of Jesus Christ, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,

he gave the right to become children of God.” Salvation is a free gift, but it needs to be received by faith in the finished work of Christ. The finished work of His death on the cross for our sins, and His rising again to give us new life.

Benediction

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the man

 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,

 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

²but his delight is in the law of the Lord,

 and on his law he meditates day and night.

³He is like a tree

 planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

May the Lord prosper you in your walk with Him as you grow in your love of His perfect and precious Word.