

Know It and Keep It

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 October 2019

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] We're in Psalm 119, verses 97 to 104. It's the main... Psalm 119, 97 to 104.

Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

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

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through your precepts, I get understanding. Therefore, I hate every false way. About 92%, they say, of Americans own at least one Bible.

And they say that the average household has three Bibles. That's pretty crazy, huh? However, as George Gallup, he's the famous pollster, the Gallup polls are named after.

[1 : 3 0] He's probably the leading pollster on religion in the country. And the way he puts it is, we revere the Bible as a country, but we don't read it. We revere the Bible, we don't read it.

And one of his surveys shows that fewer than half of the Americans can name the first book of the Bible, which I'm confident all of you can do. Only a third know who preached the Sermon on the Mount.

Many of the people named Billy Graham as the person who preached the Sermon on the Mount. And the quarter of the Americans who were surveyed don't even know what is celebrated on Easter, that they don't believe that that's the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

So biblical literacy has steadily declined, even while the percentage of people who are college educated has been going up steadily, right? It's tripled, really, actually, since 1935.

But I agree with what Teddy Roosevelt, 26th president of the country, said. He said this, a thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.

[2 : 3 8] And Roosevelt was not a slouch academically. He went to Harvard for undergrad, went to Columbia for law school. Even during his presidential campaigns, he dedicated about three hours or more to reading and learning about a wide range of topics, including history and ornithology, of all things.

And yet he believed, despite all of that, that a thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education. And I think that squares with the teaching of Psalm 119, 97 to 104.

I think the main point of this psalm is that as students in the school of God, we are to know God's word and keep it. And so first, it talks about, in the first four verses, knowing God's word.

And then in the second half, it talks about keeping God's word. And so let's talk about knowing God's word first. The psalmist begins with an admiration of God's law in verse 97. Oh, how I love your law.

It is my meditation all the day. I mean, I think this is a common human phenomenon. We think about the things we love. That's what our minds gravitate toward when we're kind of just, I guess, letting our minds drift.

[3 : 48] And likewise, the psalmist meditate on God's law all the day, it says, because he loved God's law. And so we all believe the scriptures, but do we all love the scriptures?

Because that's where we find the mind of God, right? We hear the voice of God. There's a fourth century Christian bishop from Milan named Ambrose, and he put it this way.

He says, as in paradise, in the Garden of Eden, as in paradise, God walks in the holy scriptures seeking man. Do we see scripture that way? That God is there to speak to us through it, and he is speaking us from it.

And we love God's word because of that and think about it all the day. And the psalmist tells us why he loves God's word so much in verses 98 to verse 100. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

[4 : 54] Three comparative sentences that talk about why he loves God's word so much. It's because God's word makes him wiser than his enemies, gives him more understanding than all his teachers, and makes him understand even more than the aged.

It sounds a little bit arrogant if you just read that maybe out of context, but it's not arrogance in himself as much as he's boasting in God's word, the virtues of merits of God's word.

And of course, it's assuming that the enemies and the teachers and the aged that are mentioned here do not know or keep God's word, like the psalmist is doing. Because if they were, obviously they would be wise also. Because scripture contains the wisdom of God, who is wiser than all the teachers and elders of this world.

Knowing and keeping God's word makes us wiser than them all. And this refers to more than, and I think that's the knowledge that matters more than any other kind of knowledge.

And it's referring to much more than just theoretical knowledge. Notice it says in verse 100, I understand more than the aged, for because I keep your precepts.

[6 : 01] In the way people usually talk about scriptures, we wouldn't expect the word keep to appear there in that sentence. You would more likely to read something like, I understand more than the aged, for I study your precepts.

Right? But instead it says, I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. And it's keeping God's word that has led him to an increased understanding of God and his word.

So there is a kind of a practical and experiential aspect to understanding God's word. Just as, you know, mastering music theory doesn't by itself make you an accomplished musician.

Right? And just like, you know, studying the mechanics of shooting a basketball, which I've done many times through YouTube, does not make me a good basketball player.

Merely knowing the content of God's word likewise doesn't make us understand it. It doesn't, there's a kind of understanding that only comes through practice. Right? Just like you don't quite understand what it means to walk by faith, not by sight.

[7 : 12] Right? Until you do it. Until you walk by faith. Until you, in spite of what you see, live by faith. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5, 7.

And so it says in John 13, 17, if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. So as students in the school of God, we are to know God's word and keep it.

And from there, the psalmist pivots using verse 100 to speak about keeping God's word in verses 101 to 104. And it says there, 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. The psalmist keeps away from every evil way in order to keep God's word. Because God's word contains no evil, no falsity, in order to keep it, we must hold back our feet from every evil way.

And it says that he does not turn aside from the rules God has taught him. So he doesn't stray to the left or to the right. He stays right on the path of God's rules. And then he continues in verse 103, how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

[8 : 25] Honey, I mean, we just had a whole bunch of candy for Halloween. Nowadays, there's a lot of things that are sweeter. When you think of something sweet, you don't necessarily think of honey, right? But back in the day, honey was a rare commodity.

You can't just walk into a grocery store and get honey for cheap because people hadn't discovered yet how to crystallize sugar, right? That didn't happen until the fourth century. So honey was a coveted and rare sweetener that can be added to all kinds of food and drinks.

And so now, even though nowadays we can imagine a lot of things we might rather have than honey, back then honey was like, that's the sweet stuff, right? That's what you want, like, you know, to add to your food.

And the psalmist is saying, using that as an analogy, saying that God's word tastes sweeter than honey. And it's such an intimate metaphor, right? Tasting something, taste and see that the Lord is good, Psalm 34.

It's more intimate and personal than like any of our other sensory perceptions. It's like, not like seeing or touching or even smelling, right? Those are all things that are external to us, right?

[9 : 32] Yet tasting, it involves ingesting. It becomes a part of you, right? It's, and that's how intimately the psalmist is acquainted with God's word. He knows the sweet taste of scripture.

And I think that's the key to keeping God's word. In his book, *Desiring God*, John Piper, writes about it this way. He says, I know of no other way to triumph over sin long term than to gain a distaste for it because of a superior satisfaction in God.

Right? We develop a distaste for sin by savoring the sweet taste of God's word, by knowing it and keeping it. And then verse 104 concludes this stanza by bringing it full circle.

It began in verse 97 with the declaration, Oh, how I love your law. And then it ends with the declaration, I hate every false way. So if you love the way of God's law, you hate every other way that contradicts it, right?

As students in the school of God, we are to know God's word and keep it. And when we devote our lives to knowing and keeping God's word, cover to cover, without fail, it brings us to Jesus.

[10 : 49] It brings us to Jesus Christ because He is the incarnate Word to whom the inscripturated Word, the written Word, bears witness. And it says in 1 Corinthians 1, 18 to 24, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?

Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. This really echoes the spirit of this stanza of Psalm 119.

[12 : 02] The word of Christ stumps the wise and the discerning of this world. It makes us wiser than our enemies, even though they might see it as foolishness. It makes us, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word of Christ, makes us wiser than our enemies, more learned than our teachers, and more understanding than even the aged.

Because it's the wisdom that no man could have imagined or foreseen, that the Son of God would become the Son of Man to make sons of men like the sons of God. That the Holy One would die for sinful ones to make them saints, holy, and set apart for God.

In the person and work of Jesus Christ and His life, death, and resurrection, we see the fulfillment of this psalm. And it's as we believe in the word of Christ, in the gospel, and live in accordance with it, that we taste the sweetness of God and develop a distaste for the bitterness of sin.