

Happiness of Keeping God's Word

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] You have a mischievous smile on your face.

I was really looking forward to Psalm 119. I love Psalm 119. What do you mean for? Do I have Psalm 119? No, we're not.

So I'm just going to do the first eight verses. Yeah, so Psalm 119. Let me read it out loud for us. It says, Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong but walk in His ways. You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes. Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

[1 : 06] I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes. Do not utterly forsake me.

So this is the, as you guys know, there are 1,000, I think, I think a lotion got in my eye. So I'm not crying.

It's just, there's a, there's 1,189 chapters in the Bible, and this is the longest chapter in the entire Bible, as you guys know, 176 verses.

And remarkably, the whole thing is an acrostic poem. And there are 22 stanzas. So stanza, basically the paragraph of poetry. And it corresponds to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

So in the first stanza, every line, so every verse, begins with the first Hebrew letter, basically Hebrew equivalent of an A. And then in the second stanza, every verse begins with B, and then so on.

[2 : 07] So it's a mnemonic device intended to help us memorize it. And so that we could remember and rehearse God's word, even when we don't have it in hand at all places and all times.

And people write poems about all kinds of things, right? I mean, wondrous things in nature, the beautiful, romantic love interest, or about just, just the tragedies of life.

But Psalm 119 is, I think, fittingly and wonderfully all about the central importance of God's word. And it's, Kevin DeYoung puts it this way in his book, Taking God at His Word.

He says, Psalm 119 shows us what to believe about the word of God, what to feel about the word of God, and what to do with the word of God. And each stanza contains eight verses, and those, I think they chose, the psalmist chose eight to correspond to eight different Hebrew words that exist for, to refer to scripture.

There's eight different types of words used. In the ESV, those words are variously translated as commandments, word, rules, promise, law, precepts, testimonies, and statutes.

[3 : 25] So those are the words that are used throughout Psalm 119 to refer to scripture, God's word. And, and if you've never memorized large chunks of scripture before, this is a really good place to start, because it's about God's word and to, committed to memory.

And you may have already heard of William Wilberforce. You guys know the name from the movie Amazing Grace, or maybe you just know your history. And he, he was a British member of parliament, and he became a Christian at the age of 26.

He became a member of parliament when he was 21. Amazing. And a year after his conversion, on October 28, 1787, he wrote in his diary, quote, God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade, and the reformation of manor.

In that day and age, it meant morals, the reformation of morals and the, the end of the slave trade.

He, he worked tirelessly toward those ends throughout his political career, which spanned over four decades, and that culminated in the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

And in his book, in which he talks about seven men who made a huge impact in history, Eric Metaxas writes about William Wilberforce, and there he writes that Wilberforce would also sometimes walk the two and a half miles from parliament to his home.

[4 : 50] And the second half of the walk took him through a portion of Hyde Park. Wilberforce had it timed so that if he began reciting Psalm 119 when he entered the park, he would be finished by the time he got home.

It took him 20 minutes to recite the whole thing. And this was his habit on his walk back from parliament to his house to recite Psalm 119 from memory as he walked through Hyde Park. And so I wanted to challenge people here, and I was hoping to share it with the church too, to memorize Psalm 119. I'm planning on doing it as well.

And you really just have to memorize one verse a day and do two verses on Sundays. Then you'll do one stanza per week. So you do a stanza leading up to the Wednesday prayer service, and then we'll do the next stanza, and so on.

And then we'll have the last week of the month during the prayers of fasting when we don't have the message through the Psalms to review and catch up if we're behind. And if we do that, I think we'll be done around the end of the year.

[5 : 55] So we'll be in Psalm 119 for a while. But I think that would be really cool if someone wanted to do it, and so I wanted to issue a challenge. A lot of believers have memorized this throughout church history.

I don't know why. Maybe it's like the challenge of memorizing the longest chapter in the Bible, or I think it's, really I think it's because of what it says about God's word, how our delight, God's people's delight in the word of God.

So, it really is two parts into this first stanza. The first four verses is about the blessedness of keeping God's word. And the second half, verses five to eight, are about the desire to keep God's word.

And the whole thing is really teaching us that it is the blessedness of keeping God's word that make us desire to keep God's word. And so let's look at the blessedness of keeping God's word.

Twice in verses one to three, the word blessed is repeated. It says, blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.

[7 : 07] So the word blessed, it seems like technical jargon, but really it means happy.

Blessedness is happiness. And so those who walk according to the law of the Lord are happy.

And sometimes Christians say, you know, God wants you to be holy, not happy. I mean, you guys have probably all heard that. I've heard that, right? But this is actually a misleading statement according to verses like this.

Because yes, God wants us to be holy, but only a holy life is a truly happy life. So God wants us to be happy as well. And so the 17th century English pastor Thomas Brooks wrote a book entitled The Crown and Glory of Christianity, colon, or holiness, the only way to happiness.

And in the intro chapter, he writes that holiness differs nothing from happiness but in name.

Holiness is happiness in the bud, and happiness is holiness at the full.

Happiness is nothing but the quintessence of holiness. So happiness, and not happiness, of course, as defined by the fleeting pleasures of this world, but true happiness comes from holiness.

[8 : 19] And what if we really believe this, that the living a holy life is not a drudgery, that obeying God's word is not boring, that it's not onerous, but that it's happy, right?

It's joyous. It brings true, lasting fulfillment. And it's this happiness, this blessedness of keeping God's word that makes us desire to keep God's word.

And notice the importance of keeping God's word in these verses. So normally, when we think of a book, right, the verb that we associate with a book is the verb to read, right? But here, repeatedly, the psalm emphasizes keeping God's word.

The words keep and walk are repeated, right? So obviously, in order to keep it, you've got to read it, but you can't stop that reading. You've got to apply it and obey and live it out.

So verses 1 to 4, it says, blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his testimony, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.

[9 : 21] You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. So reading God's word has to not merely be a theoretical exercise, but it must be experiential, practical, has to be lived out in practice.

And to that end, the word of God is an unfailing guide. God. So think about this with me for a second. We can dream about this as believers. Imagine living the perfect life, a blameless life, in no speech or thought or deed can anyone put any blame on us or fault on us.

Imagine living that kind of life. Because it seems impossible, right? All the other religious texts and scriptures throughout the world and all the books in the world on morality and moral philosophy.

They may have some helpful teachings in them. They may have some truthful teachings in them, but none of them can be described as without blemish. They all have their faults.

They all have mixtures. They all have falsehood. But verse 1 says that if you walk in the law of the Lord, your way will be blameless. Verse 2 says that if you keep God's testimonies, you will seek God with your whole heart.

[10 : 32] So for these reasons, the law of the Lord, the word of God is unique. And verse 4 teaches us that God has commanded us to keep his precepts diligently. Not lazily or casually or haphazardly, but diligently.

And so that's the blessedness of keeping God's word. And then it's that blessedness that produces in us the desire to keep God's word in verses 5 to 8.

And listen to the psalmist's longing to do this in verses 5 to 6. Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes. Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

So we should not want to keep God's word occasionally, but steadfastly and not to be distracted from God's word, but to keep our eyes fixed on it, it says, because the blessedness of keeping God's word makes us desire to keep it.

And I mentioned to you earlier that Psalm 119 uses eight different words to refer to scripture. And they all have different shades of meaning, and six of those are used already in this stanza alone.

[11 : 38] The first is the word law, right? And the law in English sounds so kind of formal and stilted, but the word, it actually means something like instruction. It's the Hebrew word Torah, instruction.

It's what God instructs. That's what the word of God is. The second word is testimonies. It's what God testifies, what he attests to, witnesses to. The third word is precepts.

It's what God prescribes that we follow, verse 4. And then the next is the word statute. It's verses 5 and 8, conveys what God requires, what he stipulates.

And the word commandment, verse 6 is next. It means what God commands. And the word rules is the last one, verse 7. It means what God decides, or what God rules to be his judgment.

So six of the eight different words all refer to God's word. And they have different shades of meaning. And they all convey the fact that God speaks to us through his word.

[12 : 38] He promises us through his word. He warns us through his word. He directs us and guides us through his word. He examines us with his word. He teaches us through his word. He talks to us, converses with us through his word.

And so the word of God is the chief appointed means by which God addresses his people. And for that reason, it's not like any other book in the sense that it's relational. Sometimes people say that they feel like they know the author of their favorite books.

You've probably heard people say that. And that's true only in a limited, approximate sense. But through the Bible, we really can hear God and come to know God.

Because as Hebrews chapter 4 verse 2 says, the word of God is living and active. So it's not merely a written record. It's a live means by which God communicates to us.

And so verses, with that in mind, verses 7 to 8 fittingly conclude the stanza like this. I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes.

[13 : 44] Do not utterly forsake me. I don't know if you guys have ever read of, I don't know if you read the endorsement pages in the book. I always do. And I don't know if you've ever read an endorsement on the back cover.

That just sounds completely unlike the book itself. It almost seems like the person has never read the book. It's like, how in the world did you get that from this? And so you can't endorse something, you can't praise something without actually having read it, without having familiarity with it, without

knowing the thing or the person that you're praising.

So likewise, we can't praise God without actually knowing Him. We can't praise Him uprightly, with an upright heart. We can't praise Him sincerely until we learn God's righteous rules, because it's the Word of God that reveals God Himself to us.

Because it's by the Word that we can listen to God and walk with Him. And so because of that, when we forsake God's Word, we are forsaken by God. That's why the verse ends this way, the stanza ends this way.

But if we live according to God's Word, God will not forsake us, because that's how He relates to us and communicates with us and leads and directs us. As I was kind of reflecting on this and trying to communicate how exciting that is to you guys, I was looking up, because I had read this a long time ago and I looked it up on Google, and there was actually a recent article published last month about the Breakthrough Listen Initiative.

[15 : 12] I don't know if you guys have heard of it. It's like a privately funded decade-long research project out of UC Berkeley, and the researchers involved just finished listening in on 1,300 star systems for signs of extraterrestrial life.

So 1,300 star systems. They came up empty. They didn't hear anything. But they plan on expanding their research to cover a lot more ground. And can you imagine just how boring that would be to just listen hours on end to this vast nothingness, you know, just the silence all day long?

But can you imagine for a moment, like, what if you heard something, right? People's ears just perk up, and like, wait, what? And everybody's jumping up in excitement and just come, and like, something's there, someone's there.

They're saying something, or they're communicating something, and like, it's like, similarly, I think if we don't expect God to speak to us through his word, I can understand why that might be boring to some people, right?

But God's not silent. He still speaks today, and so then we can feel that same level of excitement even more that we hear from God himself than on the other line that there's someone there speaking to us.

[16 : 30] We're not listening to the void. God's communicating to us, and when we think of it that way, it totally transforms our Bible reading experience. And I think, and I was looking back on this, and it's, I came to know the Lord, you know, at an early age, but it's really around middle school time, like, that God really started speaking to me and reading me, and so it's been like, since I was 12, so it's been a little over 20 years that now I've been reading God's word, right, as a regular habit, and that's no credit to myself.

It's God who gave me the hunger for his word, right, and he's the one that gave me the grace for it, but I can't count the number of times I've heard him speak specifically, tenderly, right, patiently, and firmly, urgently, lovingly, and my hope is everyone in our church really will have that experience, have already had that experience, and if not, will soon have experience, so that they learn to learn God's rules, and learn to praise God with an upright heart.

So it's a blessedness of keeping God's word that makes us desire to keep God's word.