

Sweets for the Soul – Psalm 119 𐤊

Have you ever taken a trip without having a firm destination in mind? Have you ever gotten in the car, and just driven, without any thought of where you are going? Even if you only take a different route to somewhere you've been many times before, traveling a few unfamiliar miles can bring a great sense of adventure. Letting go of your schedule and appointment book, ignoring your watch, and just going somewhere – anywhere – can be a wonderful release.

But eventually, such spontaneous trips have one of two ends. You either end up totally lost, or you end up back home. Aimlessly wandering around may be fun, but it is ultimately fruitless.

Well, all of us are taking a journey every single day: the trip we call life. And if we want to bear fruit for God on this trip, we need to determine His will for our lives both as individuals and as a congregation. And in order to do that, in order to know the next step God would have any of us to take, we must follow the road map found in His Holy Scriptures. But, as our text today shows us, following God's plan can be just as fun, and a whole lot more fruitful than any of our merely spontaneous trips might be.

Well, any journey we might take must begin with consideration of the route itself. Just so, the Scriptures obviously contain a great deal of direction for our lives, the Law of God that we must learn. And we must know this Law well: our text tells us in verse 97 that we are to meditate on the Law of God, not just occasionally, but all day long. We must keep the truths of the Holy Scriptures at the forefront of our minds, instead of making them just an afterthought.

And that just makes sense, doesn't it? Back in the days before GPS, I had to take a long journey to an unfamiliar destination. I knew the next exit I needed to take off of the interstate, but became so engrossed in an audio book that I blew right by it, adding a good amount of time to my trip. Just so, we must keep God's roadmap close at hand, we must keep God's guidebook firmly in mind so that we may stay on the route He has mapped out for us.

But God's plans aren't always clear, are they? And the Bible is such a big book, filled with so many seemingly mysterious details. To top it all off, we have the ever-present problem of sin in our lives, our natural tendency to rebel against God which clouds our minds and distracts us from His plans and purposes. So, how can we ever hope to understand everything that God is saying to us, even if we were to spend all day reading the Bible?

Thus, even if we know what we must learn, we must move on to determine how we must learn it. For in this passage we find that wisdom, or the ability to understand and apply God's Word to our lives, comes from the reading of God's word itself: "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies."

You see, that's the good news. God does not leave us to guess what His Word means or what He would have us to do. Instead, the very process of reading and meditating on His word makes us more able to understand what He says to us. This is a big reason why many of us are trying to read through the entire Bible this year: we get a better grasp of each part by a greater understanding how it all fits together.

And so it turns out that what we learn is intimately connected to how we learn: the process of meditating on God's word also increases our ability to understand and apply that very same Word. Yes, study of the Bible itself gives us more insight into it.

Okay, so if we are going to take a trip it is important to make these kinds of preparations. We spread out our map on the kitchen table, or we open up a map application on our phones or computers. We study the different kinds of highways available to us. We select a route and compute the mileage. We may even call ahead for reservations in the towns to which we travel. But no matter how much we have learned about our route and destination, no matter how careful our planning may be, no trip takes place while we stay at the computer or the kitchen table. No, for us to get anywhere, the rubber has to hit the road.

And the same thing is true for our Christian lives. Once we know what we must learn and how we must learn it, we need move on to how we must travel. After all, just as any trip you take must be in conformity with the traffic laws, so our journey through life must remain in conformity with God's will. So how can we know His rules of the road?

Well, both verses 100 and 101 tell us that we must "keep" God's precepts and His Word. And both Hebrew words translated as "keep" involve careful attention to detail. In fact, one of these words was used of Adam, who was placed in the Garden of Eden to "keep" it: to tend and nurture it. We must therefore take great care not only to understand God's Word but seek to put it into practice each and every day, every mile we travel along life's journey.

But, as verses 101 and 102 point out, we also keep God's law by "refraining from evil ways" and by "not departing from God's judgments." For you see, it is not enough to do what the law prescribes. We must also avoid what the law forbids.

We must seek to do that which God commands us, but we must also seek to keep ourselves free from sin, from any breach of God's law.

Well, at this point, you might wonder, "What happened to all the fun in this trip? I thought following God's map was going to be fun and fulfilling, but it sounds like more of a drag, having to mind your p's and q's all the time." And that would be a fair criticism if we did not stop to examine the content of God's law. For the law itself shows us the way we should respond to its dictates.

For what is the ultimate goal of the Christian life? What is it that God's Law commands us to do? Something that is, after all, good and pleasant and ultimately meaningful. Jesus summed up the Law this way: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

And so we see that, according to Jesus, the Law of God boils down to love. And isn't that the same reaction that the psalmist has in verse 97 to the law of God? "O how love I thy law!," he says. And why does the psalmist love God's law? Simply because of what it is. God's law tells us how to live in love, how to love God and how to love one another. Yes, love is the reason for our journey. Love is the way we conduct our journey. And love is our final destination.

And that's because God's law of love is simply a reflection of God's character, for God is love. That means that when we read the Bible, we are entering in a very real way into the very thoughts, the very heart of God. Is there any wonder that the psalmist loves reading God's Word?

And notice that he delights in the very words of the Scripture, in much the way that children love to say words over and over again, regardless of whether they understand them or not. Dr. Seuss made a fortune off of making up nonsense rhymes for children for just this reason.

Yes, children just like to hear the music of words, and to feel them in their mouths. You might say that children like the way words taste. And although their parents' and grandparents' patience might be sorely tried by the seemingly endless repetition of certain phrases and rhymes, we cannot deny that children enjoy words in and of themselves. And they especially enjoy repeating things that their parents say, even if they don't know what these things mean.

It is this basic, simple sort of enjoyment that the psalmist celebrates in verse 103: "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, *sweeter* than honey to my mouth!" The Hebrew word suggests not only taste but feeling, as the word for "taste" can also be translated as "smooth or pleasant." We can imagine the

psalmist repeating the words of Scripture over and over again, enjoying the very sound and feel and taste of them.

And why? Not simply because the Scriptures tell us how to love God and how to love one another. Not simply because the Scriptures tell us stories of God's love. No, we should love Scripture, even the very words of Scripture, for the same reason that children repeat the words of their parents: because the words of Scripture have been spoken by the God Who is love. They reflect the very character of the God who loves us so much. And God has given them to us, to draw us ever more deeply into this love.

Yes, that's the best reason that we should love Scripture and long to study it: because we love God. Think of how a wife cherishes a letter or an email, a text or a video call from her husband who is far away from home. Think of how a mother longs to hear the voice of her college student, even if the only reason he's calling is to ask for more money. It is love that makes any message precious. So when we realize that the Scriptures are a love letter from God to us, of course we will cherish it.

And what an amazing letter it is! For just think: the God whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts has condescended to communicate with us, and in words that we can understand! Just think: the God who called the universe into existence with a word, has spoken the same kinds of words to us as well: words full of love and mercy, full of grace and truth. Just think: the God who justly condemns everyone for our sinful rebellion against Him, has also spoken of His gracious plans to save all who would turn to Christ in faith!

And so, along with the psalmist, should we not hate whatever is false, whatever denies God and God's truth? Should we not long to saturate our very selves with the sounds of Scripture? Should we not seek to follow God's good and perfect will for our lives? Should we not long to know more about God's gracious plans for us? And as we seek God's will in Scripture, should we not be confident that He will reveal His plans for us, showing us the next steps He wants us to take?

So, let's take out the roadmap of the Scriptures and plan what our next steps in ministry will be. For if we follow the route for our lives that God has laid out for us, joy and fulfillment will be ours as well. We need not be afraid of what is around the bend on this road we have never traveled, because the God Who has loved us enough to die for us has been there already. And He will be with us every step of the way.