

# 4 Priorities for the New Year

## “Scripture”

Psalm 19:7-14

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 3, 2016

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Psalm 19.
- Last week we talked about how once a person becomes a Christian, he or she discovers that they are in a fight – a fight *against* temptation and sin. We emphasized the place of prayer in this fight.
  - But today we will see that we are not just fighting *against* something, we are also fighting *for* something. A Christian is always fighting to keep his or her soul glad in God.
    - When God, in His grace, grants new life to a spiritually dead person, Jesus says that person is born again. One sign that you are truly a Christian is that like any newborn baby, you have an appetite - an appetite for God. You hunger and thirst for God.
- We can see this appetite in King David. In Psalm 42 he says, ***“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you oh God. My soul thirst for God, the living God. Where can I go to meet with God?”***
  - Christian bookstores have utterly ruined this verse. They do it by selling paintings of deer sipping water from clear streams in lush meadows. But that is not the image. No, David is saying he longs for God like a deer in the midst of severe drought who has collapsed under the severe heat. It is half dead because it cannot find water.
    - David says that if he does not get God, he will die. So the painting should be of a half dead deer in a barren landscape.
- And yet, like us, David seems to entirely lose his appetite for God at times. One day he is flying high with joy saying in Psalm 63, ***“On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.”*** And yet another day in Psalm 6 he has forgotten God and sinned and he says, ***“all night long I flood my bed with weeping.”***
  - Don’t you love how real this is? Like us, David had good days and bad days - days when his soul desired God and delighted in God and days when he seemed to forget that God exists at all. The Christian life is a fight. It is a fight to keep your soul glad in God.
- So how do you fight to stay glad in God? Today we are going to look at the second half of Psalm 19. Here King David shows us this simple truth: if you want to keep your soul glad in God, then you must saturate your life in the scriptures.
  - If we are honest most of our lives are barely wet with the scriptures let alone saturated. So what David is seeking to do, and what by God’s grace I am seeking to do, is to motivate you to see *why* you should saturate your life in the scriptures, *why* you must fight to make this book your highest priority, *why* you should have a plan for when and where you meditate upon it, and *why* you should read books to learn more about it.
    - So let’s look at the reasons David gives for why we should saturate our lives in scripture.

## THE SCRIPTURES INTRODUCE US

- First then, we must saturate our lives in the scriptures because they introduce us to God. In what way do the scriptures introduce us to God? **(SHOW SLIDE)** The scriptures introduce us to God in a way that is far superior to creation.
  - You will notice that this psalm has two parts. In verses 1-6 David is talking about how glorious creation is and then suddenly, abruptly, and without warning, it seems he changes topic in verse 7. From verses 7-11 he is delighting in the scriptures. Shouldn't these two subjects be divided into two different psalms with one about creation and one about the scriptures? No. The two halves are simply two facets of one subject. Listen, the subject of Psalm 19 is how God reveals Himself.
    - Verses 1-6 deal with how God reveals Himself through creation. This is called 'general revelation'. Creation is the general way God reveals himself. Verses 7-11 deal with how God reveals Himself through speaking to us. God's words are written down. This is called 'special revelation.' So God reveals who he is through creation *and* through scripture – through general revelation *and* through special revelation.
- Of the two, however, David says special revelation is infinitely more valuable. He says it is more valuable than gold. Why?
  - It is like if I showed you a picture of the Queen of England. The picture reveals some things about her like the fact that she exists, that she is a woman, and that she is the Queen. You can get a general idea of what she is like from her picture.
    - But you can't say you know her. To know her you would have to be introduced to her. The only way you could get to know her is if she initiated a relationship with you, if she spoke with you, and perhaps crossed the ocean to visit you. Then you would know her personally.
- This is why the scriptures are so superior to creation. You will notice that verses 1-6 do speak of God but it is a very impersonal across-the-ocean sort of way. The word for God in verse 1 is 'Elohim' which is simply a generic name meaning 'the divine one' or the 'the great one.'
  - Romans 1 says that from creation all people can learn that God exists and that He is great and powerful. But creation, like a picture of the Queen, is limited in what it reveals about God.
- But watch the radical shift in verse 7 when he begins speaking about the scriptures. David refers to God 7 more times but never once as 'Elohim.' What does he call Him? 'LORD' which when capitalized like this means 'Yahweh.' Yahweh is the personal name that God gave to Moses when he spoke to him and revealed himself at the burning bush.
  - This is why David says the scriptures are more valuable than gold because in them God initiates a relationship with us and introduces Himself.
- Consider with me just how valuable the scriptures are then because mark this: God did not have to speak and introduce Himself to us. He had every right to remain silent and to keep Himself hidden from us.

- Carl Henry gives my favourite definition of revelation. ***“Revelation is the process whereby God forfeited his personal right to privacy that we might know Him.”***
- So Christianity says you can know what God is like because God has revealed himself to you. He has revealed that he exists through the beauty of creation all around you. But he went further. He spoke to humanity through men like Moses. He introduced himself to us. He told us what he is like and they wrote it down for us.
  - But God went even further. He was not content to just send us letters. No, he came to us in person. God crossed the oceanic divide between Himself and humanity when He became a man. He came and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus. The Word of God became flesh. In Jesus, the Word of God, we have the supreme revelation of God.
    - And you can read all about him in the scriptures.
- So that is the first point: saturate your life in the scriptures because they introduce us to God in a way that is far superior to creation.

## THE SCRIPTURES GROUND US

- Second, we must saturate our lives in the scriptures because they ground us in God. In what way do they ground us in God? **(SHOW SLIDE)** The scriptures ground us in God in a way that rescues us from the quicksand of relativism.
  - The scriptures give you solid ground to stand on. This is good news in a culture that is sinking in the quicksand of relativism.
- Notice all the adjectives David piles up to describe the law of God. Verse 7 is the umbrella statement over them all. The law is ‘perfect.’ It is flawless, whole, and complete. The scriptures lack nothing. Because they are perfect David goes on to say in verse 7 that they are ‘sure’ – you can build your life on it with absolute confidence. In verse 8 they are ‘right’ and ‘pure’. They will not mislead you. In verse 9 it is ‘clean’ and ‘true.’ The scriptures have no mixture of evil in them.
  - So David says you should saturate your life in the scriptures because they alone are the perfect standard to build your beliefs and lifestyle on.
- This is good news for our generation today. Despite people saying they don’t want any standards, or that truth is relative, we have been left with a sense of hopelessness.
  - If everything is relative what should you believe? How can you decide what is right and wrong when there is no right and wrong? Many people express an deep inner angst over this relativism.
- Listen to this quote from Jean Paul Sartre, who was the famous atheist and existentialist philosopher from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What I love about Sartre is that he was honest. He did not believe that God exists and he admitted that this causes tremendous problems.
  - He said he thinks ***“it very distressing that God does not exist.”*** Why? ***“because all possibility of finding values...disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an a priori Good [a universal standard of good that exists apart from us], since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. Nowhere is it written that the Good exists, that we must be honest, that we must not lie; because the fact is we are on a plain where there are only men. Dostoyevsky said, ‘If God didn’t exist,***

*everything would be possible.’ Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn.” Why is man unhappy? “because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to.”<sup>1</sup>*

- Sartre was distressed because he knew that if God does not exist then no one can say anything is ultimately true, or ultimately right and wrong. But how do you build a society on that? How do you build your life on the idea that everything you believe is only true for you and may not be true for others?
- In a world that is sinking in the quicksand of relativism, Christianity comes with good news. It says that God has revealed his law to us. Our Creator has told us what is best for us.
  - Do you see why the scriptures are more valuable than gold then? Why you should saturate your life in them? Because the law of the LORD is perfect. You have a standard, something perfectly trustworthy, right, radiant, sure, and pure to ground your life on that saves you from the quicksand of relativism.

## THE SCRIPTURES BIND US TO GOD

- So, saturate your life in the scriptures because they introduce us to God and ground us in God. In the third place saturate your life in the scriptures because they bind us to God. How do they bind us to God? **(SHOW SLIDE)** The scriptures bind us to God in a way that enhances human freedom.
  - We looked at the adjectives now let’s look at the verbs. Listen to what David’s says about the law of God. Look at verse 7. **READ 7a – “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.”** Revive has the sense of turning us back to God and refreshing us.
    - In verse 7 the testimony *makes* the simple minded ‘wise.’ In verse 8 they cause the heart to rejoice and then enlighten the eyes so we can see on the dark path of life.
      - Because of all this he says in verse 10 that the scriptures are more valuable to him than gold and sweeter than honey. In a day when no one ate sugar, eating honey would have been a mouth-watering delight.
  - Like many of us C.S. Lewis struggled to see how God’s laws could be so joyful, reviving, and delectable to David. In his book *Reflections on the Psalms* he said,
    - ***“One can well understand this being said of God’s mercies...But what the poet is actually talking about is God’s law, His commands...This for me was very mysterious. ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ - I can understand that you can, and must, respect these ‘statutes’, and try to obey them, and assent to them in your heart. But it is very hard to find how they could be, so to speak, delicious, how they exhilarate. We may obey them but surely they could be more aptly compared to a dentist’s forceps or to the front line [of battle] than to anything enjoyable or sweet.”<sup>2</sup>***

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Gerald Wilson, *NIV Application Commentary – Psalms Volume 1*, 379.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 49-50.

- And yet David says God's rules are like sweet honey to the mouth. Because the Bible is showing us what we already know in our everyday experience, namely that true freedom is always found within restrictions. There is a kind of binding that enhances freedom.
  - What would happen to your pet fish if it said, ***"Who made this stupid law that fish should be restricted to water? I'm breaking these shackles and jumping out to join the humans?"*** A fish is most free when it is bound to water just like you are most free when you allow the law to bind you to the right hand side of the road.
- Listen, the laws of God in scripture are a gracious gift because our Creator knows what makes us fully human and wants to defend and enhance that freedom.
  - When God forbids anger, he is saving you and others from the destructive effects of anger. When God restricts sex to marriage he is telling us that multiple sex partners violates who we are and will not bring happiness.
- So David is motivating us to saturate our lives in scripture because they meet our deepest needs – our need for the great God to introduce us to Himself, to reveal what it means to live rightly, and to see the perfect laws he gives are gracious gifts that bind us but only in a way that enhances our freedom.
  - Through the scriptures God does all of this. It's no wonder that David hungers for the honey.

## THE SCRIPTURES DEVASTATE US

- But if we stop now with only these three points we will have missed the entire point of why God gave the scriptures and how we are to read them rightly.
  - There is an experiential progression in this Psalm that you must go through in order to be accepted by God. In verses 1-6 we find out from creation that God exists. That is where we begin.
    - In verses 7-11 we start reading about what God is like from his law and discover that He is holy, that He is perfect. God's greatness and perfection brings forth our admiration of Him and His laws but then it does something else to David and it must do it to us as well.
- In the fourth place we must saturate our lives in scripture because they devastate us before God. How do the scriptures devastate us? **(SHOW SLIDE)** The scriptures devastate us before God in a way that exposes our need for a Redeemer.
  - Look at verse 12-13. **READ 12-13 - Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.**
- What David experienced reading the law is exactly what should happen to you. As David read the law he delighted in how good it was in commanding us to ***"love others, be humble, look to others interests over your own, love God above all else, be generous, be patient, be faithful."*** On the one hand we admire it but then we look inward at our failures in keeping it and we are devastated. No matter how hard we redouble our efforts the law is unyielding in exposing how imperfect we are.
  - This is the job of the law – to show us that we are sinners. If you think you have lived good enough lives to merit God's approval you have not

read the law. It demands absolute perfection and if you are honest you have not achieved that.

- You are supposed to, like David, start realizing that not only do you need grace to avoid willful sins but you also have hidden faults that you cannot even discern.
- This devastation is a good thing though. Why? Because it will do for you what it did for David. It will show you your need of a redeemer. A redeemer is a rescuer.
  - In Galatians 3 Paul says the law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. When you see your need for a Redeemer then the Bible comes alive because the entire story is how God provides a Redeemer for you. Galatians 4 says, ***“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*** Oh what good news! Jesus came to do for you what you could not do for yourself. He was born under law. He kept the law and he redeemed those who entrust themselves to Him.
    - The only way God will accept you is if you are perfect. There are only two ways to be perfect. First, you can try and do it yourself and drive yourself to despair with failure or second, you can accept the gift of Jesus’ perfect obedience. He offers it to you today.
- So as you go home this week to saturate your life in scripture you must read them properly. You must read this as a book about your Redeemer who perfectly obeyed. Stand in awe that he did this at every point and worship Him for granting to you who believe his perfect life. But there is one more way to read the law rightly.

## THE SCRIPTURES TEACH US OF GOD

- Very quickly now, we must saturate our lives in scripture because **(SHOW SLIDE)** They *teach* us of God in a way that reveals what brings Him delight.
  - The law has a new place in the life of those who are the bride of Christ. We do not use it to earn his love for we already have it. We use it to learn what delights our groom. The law reveals what kind of living brings God delight.
    - When you are in love you do not experience the other persons requests as coercive or oppressive. Heather often asks me to buy her a double double at Tim Hortons. Listen, I do not do what she asks in order to earn her love so I can get married to her. I have her love. I do what she asks because I know it brings her delight. Her wishes become my commands.
  - Christians obey God’s commands not to earn his love for we have it in Jesus but to enjoy a good relationship with Him.

## CONCLUSION

- Psalm 19 teaches us the grand sweep of the Bible. It shows that God exists and that God is perfect. In showing that God is perfect it shows that we are not. We are sinners. But it goes on to show that God has provided a Redeemer who redeemed us from the curse of the law. And once we are redeemed it shows us how to live in a way that delights him.

- All these glorious truths are expounded in the scriptures. It is no wonder that David says it is more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey.
  - Will you hunger for the honey this year?
  - What is your plan to read this book? In my experience you must have a time set aside for it, or it simply won't happen. Go online and look up Bible reading plans. Start small with may be 10 minutes a day. Saturate your life in the scriptures.