January 31, 2016

“In the Word. And the Word in Us”

Psalm 119:9-16

**FCF**: Needing the Word in our lives. And so in our minds.

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) God has given us His Word that we might walk in His ways.

(magnet) We need to be in His Word. And His Word needs to be in us.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Those of you who have been around here any length of time should be familiar with the CPC Vision Statement (READ quote) – “*A worshipping body of believers, grounded in God’s Word, increasingly gripped by His grace, growing in community, going in mission*.” Each one of those is critical. But I want to call attention to the second clause, “Grounded in God’s Word.” The Bible is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative. It is God’s very Word. We take this as a given.

As part of our Vision Statement, that is a clause that orients our goals and ministry. And, as you have heard already, we are moving towards launching a new ministry tied to that very clause, CPC Grow Teams, a practical outworking of three things. First, the power of Scripture. Second, the need to have it in our hearts. And, third, the challenge of how to go about that.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Psalm 119:9-16

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

The National Bible Bee is a quiz competition, focusing especially on memorizing biblical texts. The competition starts with local contests all around the United States. The top 360 contestants from each age group then advance to the national level. The grand prize winner in the senior high division wins a $100,000 prize. But besides the prize money, what drives these kids to put in the many hours leading up to the competition? Last year’s winner, Hannah Leary, gives some insight. Speaking of the book of Hebrews, she said (READ *WORLD* quote):

*I started, as I often do, just reading the text [Hebrews 6 and 7] about 10 times. At first, yes, I was just reading theological words. But then it started coming alive. The ideas were running through my head, and there was fresh understanding. Not 100 percent—but the Lord was revealing Himself through His Word.*

Theologians speak of the three uses of the Law of God. Let me summarize it with some alliteration. It serves as a muzzle, warning and restraining us from going off the rails. It serves as a mirror, forcing us to see the bent of our hearts and driving us to Christ. And then it also serves as a map, guiding and directing us in the ways God created and intends for us to live.

Muzzle, mirror, and map. But, if I might be so bold, I’d like to add a fourth – meal. We speak of “devouring a book”. Our medieval ancestors would have readily understood since the stomach was a metaphor for memory. The Bible is meant to be devoured and digested, even memorized. In fact, centuries ago, some monastic guides made it clear that, to become a monk, you had to have memorized all the Psalms. Now, you say, “*But we have our smartphones now, with all of that at our fingertips*.” Ah, friends. We’ve gained great access. But lost the effect.

God has given us His Word that we might walk in His ways. We need to be in His Word. And His Word needs to be in us. That’s what we need to consider. We’ll do it in three stages. First, what is this about? Second, why is it important? And, third, how do we go about it?

1. **WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?**

Let’s start with the basics of what this is all about. What are we talking about here?

1. *The Word of God*

What is it that we are to be in and is to be in us? The Bible, the very Word of God.

1. Synonyms

Note the breadth of synonyms the psalmist uses to describe it. Commandments – coming with authority. Statutes – laws with binding force and permanence. Rules – ordinances, decisions from an all-wise Judge. Testimonies – a witness to God’s will. Precepts – particular, detailed instructions. Why so many of these synonyms? Because the Bible functions in so many ways.

1. Descriptions

But, beyond the synonyms, what else does the psalmist say? (READ Psalm 119:16) This is a quiet, relaxed settledness. (READ Psalm 119:14) This is a festive exultation expressed towards a treasure of riches that far exceeds the value and worth of any other to be found on the earth.

1. *Stored in Our Hearts*

That is what the psalmist says we are to be in and is to be in us (READ Psalm 119:11).

1. Beyond just study

Understand this means more than just study and analysis, more than stimulating discussion.

1. But truly treasuring

This is storing and hiding, truly treasuring, dwelling in and on it – committing it to memory.

Such are the great riches of the Scriptures, the written Word of God. Such is the great poverty of our hearts. Such then is the need for us to be hiding it, storing it up in our hearts.

*Illustration:*

Think of Jesus’ mother, Mary. After the shepherds arrive with the news of the angels, we read (READ Luke 2:19). A few years later, when Mary and Joseph take their son to the Temple in Jerusalem, we read (READ Luke 2:51). This is much of what we see here in Psalm 119.

*Application:*

For application, let me just read you this quote from Dallas Willard (READ quote):

*Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That’s where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization.*

God gave us His Word that we might walk in His ways. We need to be in it. It needs to be in us.

1. **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

And that brings us to the second question. Why is this important?

1. *The Need of Our Hearts*

I’ve alluded to this already, but let’s consider just the need of our hearts.

1. The question

The psalmist raises the question (READ Psalm 119:9a). Our “way” is the path on which we walk, the path of our life. How then can this, our life, be kept pure, unblemished and unstained?

1. The implications

He answers his question (READ Psalm 119:9-10). Our way needs to be guarded. The idea being that there are hostile forces, within and without, that could cause us to go astray. (READ Psalm 119:11) The connection is clear. The means of guarding our way is a storing of His Word.

1. *The Work of the Spirit*

Such is the need of our hearts. Which is then beautifully met by the work of the Spirit.

1. Once for all

He is the author of the Word, the voice behind all the human writers. This is what we mean when we say the Bible is inspired. God has breathed it out. That is a once-for-all thing.

1. Continual

But the work of the Spirit related to the Word continues in that He illuminates what He has inspired. He helps us to understand it. He presses it into our hearts, shaping our affections and our imaginations – most especially when we have committed portions of the text to memory.

So, why is this important? The need of our hearts coupled with the work of the Spirit. Think of it this way. God often works through means. In this case, the means is the Scripture pressed into our memory. And with that pressing, we are then prepared for different situations.

*Illustration:*

When we’re sure of the need, we’re all about being prepared. Think of last week and the winter storm. Key items in the stores swept away – salt, shovels, sleds. I heard it said that with the bread, milk, and eggs cleared off the shelves, Clarksville must really be into French Toast.

*Application:*

Well, committing biblical texts to memory, pressing it into our minds, is a means of being prepared for a host of things. In our battle against sin, in our striving against the temptation, deception, and accusations of Satan, we can take up what Paul describes as “the sword of the Spirit”. And in our conversations with others, in the comfort and counsel we long to bring to non-believers or fellow believers, there is so much more to using the actual words of God.

The Spirit, in ways only He can, brings those words to mind. God has given us His Word that we might walk in His ways. We need to be in His Word. And His Word needs to be in us.

1. **HOW DO WE GO ABOUT IT?**

Finally, if all this is true, if this is something we need to heed, how do we go about it? I can’t unpack all that now. But let me point out three things – humbly, patiently, and expectantly.

1. *Humbly*

From the start, we have to go about this humbly, abandoning any pride we might carry.

1. Learning from

We have to be willing to learn from others, their observations and experience. Just recently, I picked this up. If you give five minutes a day to this, you’ll have invested 30 hours in a year.

1. Walking with

That’s worth knowing. So we have to be willing to learn from each other. And, in many cases, we have to be willing to walk with each other. We need encouragement. And accountability.

1. *Patiently*

So we need to go about this humbly. And also patiently, recognizing this will take time.

1. All efforts at memorization

Let me try and explain it this way. All efforts at memorization, whatever it is we’re working on, will have an effect on our imagination. What we take in has a way of burrowing in, taking root.

1. All efforts at changing habits

Most any effort at memorization will have an effect on our imagination. And most any effort at changing habits tends to be a struggle – especially here. There is resistance as we unlearn old ways. There is resistance as we do battle with spiritual forces that pull us in other directions.

1. *Expectantly*

So we need to go about this humbly and patiently. But then also expectantly.

1. The invitation

Consider Psalm 119 as an invitation from the psalmist to us all, an invitation worth accepting.

1. The testimonies

Consider Psalm 119 as a testimony from the psalmist, a helpful word worth taking to heart. “*This is what I have experienced. This is what I know – of myself and God’s Word in my life*.”

How then do we go about this? I would say humbly, patiently, and expectantly.

*Application:*

Let me encourage you with some examples. First, from the life of Augustine, a church father from the 4th and 5th century. It is said of Augustine that the fruit of memorizing Scripture was such that it became a second language for him, that he wrote not only in Latin but in Psalms.

Another example is Martin Luther. As a monk, even before he discovered the good news of the gospel of grace, Luther had a deep love of the Bible. He poured over it and it poured into him. This was the kindling. And so when the Lord opened his eyes to see the gospel, it was as though a match was lit. Everything came together for him. And the world was set ablaze.

Let’s go about this humbly, patiently, and expectantly. God has given us His Word that we might walk in His ways. We need to be in His Word. And His Word needs to be in us.

**CONCLUSION:**

Let me take you back to the text we read earlier in the service from Matthew 4, often referred to as “The Temptation of Jesus”. Here’s the larger context (READ Matthew 3:16-17). Pulling this together, what we see is that Jesus withstood temptation, showing Himself to be the Son of God. What does that mean? We must then look to Him in our own temptations. But what does that mean? What does it mean to “look” to Jesus here? And how are we to do it?

Part of it is right in front of us in how we see Jesus withstanding temptation. Think with me here. He could easily have responded with His own original words. But instead, Jesus quotes from the Scriptures. Why? What are the Psalms? It’s helpful to understand they are the songs of Jesus. He is the first singer. They are about Him, of Him, from Him, and by Him. Listen again now (READ Psalm 119:9-16). Jesus loves the written Word of God. As should we.

In that, He is our example and model, not just in His devotion to the Word but in how He relies upon it in His hour of need. Think with me. Given who Jesus is – the eternal Son of God – if He needed to turn His heart and mind to the Scriptures, how much more do we? Or, coming at it from another angle, given all that He faced – a full out assault by Satan – if turning His heart and mind to the Scriptures proved sufficient in that, how much more will it in whatever we face?

God has given us His Word that we might walk in His ways. We need to be in His Word. And His Word needs to be in us. Let’s take strides together to experience what that means.

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