

Introduction

I am winding up a series of messages this morning that I called "Pastor's Prerogative." There have been some matters that God has been impressing on me in the last year and here at the beginning of the new year I wanted to take a brief break from our journey through the gospel of Matthew to share them with you. At the beginning of last year I began going through Psalm 119 one verse a day. Our Young Adult Bible study also made our way through this longest of the psalms. The study of Psalm 119 was a rich blessing. Psalm 119:72 says, "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces." And so it will be to the one who loves the Lord.

The Business Insider pulled together a list of the 19 most expensive items in the world. If you want to appear ageless, there is a miracle cream called Creme de la Mer. You can buy it at Nordstrom. It costs \$175/oz which is \$2,800/lb. Also included on the list is saffron, a flowering plant used in natural remedies and for seasoning and coloring. Saffron weighs in at \$11.13 per gram or \$5,040 per pound. Iranian Beluga caviar costs \$35/gram or \$16,000 per pound. Gold comes in at \$42.42 per gram. Rhodium is \$45/gram. Platinum is \$48. And I haven't mentioned diamonds, but a colorless 1 carat diamond can cost more than \$65,000/gram. The most expensive item on the list is antimatter. It is thought to be able to fuel spaceships to other stars and planets in the future for a mere \$1 trillion/gram.

I do not believe the psalmist was aware of rhodium, platinum, creme de la mer, or antimatter. However, he was very familiar with gold and silver. And his estimation of the worth of the law from the mouth of God is that it was better to him than THOUSANDS of gold and silver pieces. Thousands was the largest word for number in common use among the Hebrews. It would be like us saying "millions" or gazillions. You simply could not say it any stronger than he said here that he would not give up God's word for all the wealth in the world. It is not merely worth more; it is better for him than all the wealth in the world. Psalm 119 points out a number of reasons

why this would be true. The word of God does me more good than anything this world can offer. It makes me wiser than my teachers. It funnels joy and gladness into my heart. It convicts me of sin leading to repentance and life. It is perfect. It converts the soul. W. S. Plummer in his commentary on the Psalms writes of God's law, "It guides me, it cheers me, it sustains me, it is with me in the most trying hour, and most stands me in stead when my necessities are the greatest, and my afflictions the deepest" (1051).

All this is true. How blessed are we that God has given us his priceless word, his statutes, testimonies, and commands. They are priceless and irreplaceable. But one aspect of the value and usefulness of the word of God has stood out to me lately. And it is that aspect that I want to impress upon you this morning. Beyond guiding us into truth and wisdom and righteousness and all that good stuff it does directly for us, the law of God, the commandments and statutes and testimonies of God reveal the nature and character of God to us. To know the law of God is to know God better. We can study the scripture and discern that God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (everywhere present), omniscient (all knowing), and sovereign. We study the scripture and learn that God is holy, just, gracious, merciful, and loving and more. But there are certain aspects of who God is, we can call it the divine nature, that are revealed in His law. When we look at the law of God, we are not merely looking at commands and rules but at the heart of God himself. And I believe understanding this fact is important for an appropriate appreciation of the law of God.

Psalm 119:34 says, "Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart." The psalmist is saying that the better understanding we have the more inclined we will be to keep the law of God. Having understanding refers to having my comprehension of truth deepened and increased. When my thinking is more in tune with reality, I have greater understanding. And when my understanding is deepened in this way, my grasp of the beauty and majesty of the testimonies of God will increase my wholehearted observance of them. And it is my prayer and desire and goal that our time in the word this morning will deepen our understanding of God's law so that we will be encouraged and enabled and filled with longing for keeping the law of God.

[Read Text – Psalm 119:1-3; Pray]

The first three verses of this incredible psalm set the tone of the whole psalm. They show us that the ways of God are revealed in the law of God and that seeking God involves seeking the testimonies of God. Let's walk through these verses together. They describe for us the blameless way.

I. The Blameless Way Is the Way of Happiness.

Verse 1 says, Blessed are those whose way is blameless. Verse 2 says Blessed are those who keep his testimonies. So twice right there we have the word blessed. The root idea of this word is happiness. Happy are those whose way is blameless. Happy are those who keep the testimonies of the Lord.

The world, the flesh, and the devil will tell you that obeying the commandments of the Lord will rob you of happiness. God's ways are restrictive. The path to joy will take you through the wall of God's confining rules. So the world celebrates the violation of God's law. Have you seen video clips of the New York assembly cheering last week as they passed a law that effectively eliminates any protection for the life of an unborn child, effectively allowing baby-murder to the point of birth? That is the voice of the world.

But the psalmist knows better. The ways of the Lord are the ways of real happiness. Blessed are those who walk in them. There is no joy like the joy of obeying God despite what the voices of his enemies may say.

The psalmist also says here

II. The Blameless Way Is the Way of the Lord.

There are several different ways here that the psalmist describes the blameless way. Those whose way is blameless walk in the law of the Lord. They keep HIS testimonies. They walk in his ways.

The blameless way is the happy way. And the happy way is the way of obeying the law OF THE LORD, keeping HIS TESTIMONIES, and walking in HIS ways. There is a way that seems right to man but the end thereof is the way of death. It is the way of the Lord that is the way to life. It is

living according to HIS testimonies. God has prescribed how human beings should live. He has given commands, directives. These are called his testimonies. It is as though God has been called to witness and his law is his testimony of what is right and good. His way is the way of blessing. Blessed are those who walk in his way.

What I do not want you to miss, however, is a third thing the psalmist is emphasizing here.

III. The Blameless Way Is the Way of Seeking God.

The psalmist refers to those who walk in the law of the Lord and keep his testimonies and walk in his ways as ones who seek [the Lord] with all their heart. This blessed way is not merely a way of following rules and obeying laws. It is actually the way of seeking God himself.

This communicates that the law of God is actually an extension of God himself. I think of it this way. God's commandments are like the directives, instructions, and formative influence that parents use to guide and mold and shape their children. What parents think is important, what parents think reflects good character, good behavior, an honorable life is what we as parents will seek to reproduce in our children. What we are making of them is a reflection of us. To the extent that they accept and implement our influence, they will walk in our way. I cannot think of a more gratifying thing for a parent to hear from their children than for them to say, "I want to parent my children just like you parented me. Help me be like you." That's when they are actually walking in the ways of their parents and seeking to live in fellowship with their parents.

Even so, to walk in the way of the Lord and own his ways as good ways and right ways, to embrace them and pursue them is in fact to pursue God himself and fellowship with God. You cannot seek God without seeking his ways. Verse 10 reiterates what he has said here, "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!"

The psalmist throughout Psalm 119 extols the goodness of God's commands and his delight in them.

V. 14 – in the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

V. 16 – I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

V. 20 – My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

V. 24 – Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.

V. 31 – I cling to your testimonies O Lord;

V. 39 – Your rules are good

V. 35 – Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

V. 48 – I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love

V. 62 – at midnight I rise to praise you because of your righteous rules

V. 68 – you are good and do good; teach me your statutes

V. 97 – O how I love your law; it is my meditation all the day

V. 111 – Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.

V. 129 – your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them

v. 131 – I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments

v. 137 – righteous are you and righteous are your rules

v. 164 – seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules

All these statements express joy and delight in and longing for the words and commands of the Lord. The psalmist cannot conceive of the goodness of the commands apart from who God is. He praises God for the commands. He sees God as good and doing good. And the commands are part of that goodness. He lifts his hands towards the commandments because they reflect the heart of God. They are not arbitrary rules given by

a despot who simply wants to be in charge but by a truly glorious God whose law for his creatures reflects the beauty of his own character. God's law shows what God loves and what is the delight of the Lord. To seek his law is to seek him wholeheartedly. You love God? You love his law because his law reveals who he is. God is righteous and so are his rules. His rules come from his heart.

IV. The Blameless Way of Seeking God in Seeking His Law is Not Just an OT Teaching.

There are two NT texts in particular which are grounded in the understanding that the righteousness of God's law is reflected in His person and for that reason should be reflected in God's people.

A. Colossians 3:1-17. Verses 1-4 are summed up with the exhortation to those who have been raised with Christ to seek the things that are above. That means that certain behaviors are going to be put to death and certain behaviors are going to be lived out. Verses 5-9 speak of what is to be put to death—sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying. Each of these is an example of the breaking of one of God's commandments.

Now notice what Paul says here has happened in the case of those who have been raised with Christ. These are justified believers in Christ. Verse 10 says we have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge (now notice this) after the image of its creator. Coming to Christ we are new creations and we are being renewed after the image of God. And what is that image? Well it is an image which puts off the earthly. And verses 12-15 list what we are to put on—compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, and love, and peace, and thankfulness. Each of these behaviors is a fulfillment of the law of God expressed in the second table of the ten commandments. The ungodly behaviors which defy God's law are what the image of God is not. These godly behaviors which fulfill the law of God are what make up the image of God in the people he is renewing. So you see that righteous behavior is conformity to the law of God and reflects the image of God.

B. 2 Peter 1:3-4. We learn in these verses that God has provided for us everything we need for life and godliness. We don't need magic schemes or unknowable tricks to become the people God wants us to be. He has given us everything we need. How does godliness come about? It comes through knowing him who called us to his own glory and excellence. He has called us to his own glory and excellence and if we know him we know that glory and excellence because it is reflected in his law. And by his great and precious promises we become partakers of the divine nature. Now what does this mean? Do we become god-like? No, no, becoming divine is not what Peter is saying. We become like God, yes, but not like God as divine but like God as excellent and glorious in his character, the character that is revealed in the law of God. This is made clear as Peter contrasts the divine nature with the corruption that is in the world through sinful desire. See, you become partakers of the divine nature as you escape the corruption that is in the world through sin. He is talking about practical holiness and righteousness in heart and life as exhibited in the commands, statutes, and testimonies of God. So these two NT texts reiterate that the law shows us the heart of God.

V. The Blameless Way Is the Way that Reveals God.

I know I am running out of time, but I wanted to take just a few minutes to comment on what God's Ten Commandments reveal about God. I am just scratching the surface here, but the first table of the law—you shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make any carved image to worship, you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain, and you shall remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy—the first table of the law—reflects how God sees himself. He knows himself to be the only true God. He is jealous for his worship and he will protect his name and reputation from desecration. He is a God who works and who enjoys the beauty of what he has done. The second table of the law is directed to human beings in their dealings with each other. In a nutshell we are told to honor authority, but not to murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet. God possesses authority and ordains authority. God does not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet. He disdains unrighteous anger and malice and destruction of life particularly of the vulnerable. He honors his covenants. He is completely honest. And He is completely self-sufficient and completely satisfied with who he is. And in him, his people are to exhibit the same nature.

VI. The Blameless Way Has Life-Impacting Implications

How should we respond to the beauty and majesty of God and His law?

A. Marvel. When you are suddenly aware of a threat you may do what I did this week. On the trip home from Louisville, I was driving Philip's pickup and towing Ellie's car on a trailer. We had just gotten to Milwaukee when out of nowhere and for no observable reason, black ice no doubt, we were thrown into the right lane. I involuntarily hollered out a sound of consternation. That is what you do when control of your vehicle is taken from you. And when you observe beauty, marvel is what you do. Beholding the beauty of the interconnectedness of God and his law is an occasion for marveling. God is glorious. His statutes are glorious. They reflect and display his holiness and character. We should do like the psalmist here and rise seven times a day to praise God for his righteous rules. Marvel that God is not a despot who simply wants control over the affairs of people. He is the maker of human beings whose design and whose law is for their good.

B. Yearn. The psalmist said, "I open my mouth and pant because I LONG for your commandments." Peter urged his audience, "Like newborn infants, LONG for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation." I just love having Titus around! All his baby sounds are so sweet and endearing. I don't even mind his cries that much. And when he is hungry, he is going to let you know. He refuses to be satisfied until he get what e wants. And what he wants is milk! How earnestly are you longing for the word of God? How deeply are you directing your heart to seek after it, yearn for his ways? The understanding of how God's commands are righteous, reflect the glory of God, direct us in wisdom, direct us to joy, and are beautiful in themselves should cause us to yearn over them.

C. Meditate. The psalmist declared, "O how I love your law; it is my meditation all the day" (97). Paul counsels whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise, to think on these things. If you love the law of God, demonstrate it by meditating on it. Dwell in your thoughts on what he has said. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

D. Hate what is evil and cling to what is good. Psalm 119 sets everything that is opposed to the law of God as what is evil. Verse 101 says, "I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word."

Part of the incentive I had for preaching this sermon is to arm you for battle. The world and the flesh and the devil are relentless and non-stop. How do we successfully win in the battle against temptation? Own it that the desires of the flesh are not simply to break just anybody's rules. They are desires to break the rules and testimonies that come from the very heart of God. The flesh is not neutral. It is an enemy of God and of your soul. It is an enemy of beauty and righteousness. See the commandments from God as reflective of eternal beauty and glory and excellence. Any enemy of such is a cancer which destroys, disfigures, and deals death. Abhor it with the utmost hatred and cling to what is good.

Conclusion

Out the outset this morning I mentioned Creme de la Mer, an ageless skin cream that is supposed to keep you looking young. You can buy it for \$175/oz. You could have all the gold in the world. You could own a mine full of antimatter and for that matter own the world. But what if you gain the whole world yet lose your very soul? None of those things can do for you what the law of God can do.

It directs you first to the reality that you are a sinner then it points you to God's provision for sin—Jesus Christ slain for our sin and risen from the dead. It directs you to the assurance of forgiveness and justification through faith in Jesus. The law of the Lord maps out how to pursue the righteousness and excellence of God. God's testimonies are righteous altogether and he should be praised seven times a day for their beauty.