

Precious Possessions #3

He was working as he did every day in the stone quarry near Kansas City when it suddenly happened. The explosive that he was planting to break up the rock suddenly went off unexpectedly. The next thing he knew, he was in the hospital. Days had passed by the time he regained consciousness, and when his mind finally did come to the place where it could comprehend thoughts, his first realization was that he couldn't see or move his hands at all. The doctors told him that he had lost both hands in the explosion, and his eyesight as well. For months, the young man suffered through surgery after plastic surgery on his face. In the end, his appearance was made quite normal, but his eyesight was permanently lost.

This young man who was a dedicated Christian went through an agonizing period of questioning in his life. Why did this happen? Why to me? But as he gradually came out of his depression, he found that one of the greatest losses in his life was his inability to read and study the Bible. Oh, that he were able to read the Bible again- but without eyesight or hands, how could he ever hope to have that privilege again.

When he heard of an English lady who had learned to read the Bible in Braille with her lips, the news almost seemed too good to be true. Could he also learn to read the Bible in this way? He ordered the Braille books immediately from England and anxiously awaited their arrival. But you can imagine his disappointment when he discovered that his lips were too damaged to feel the Braille impressions. When he pressed his lips to the printed pages, the nerve endings on his lips were so damaged that he couldn't feel the print. With tears streaming from his sightless eyes, he bent over to give a farewell kiss to the Braille Bible that he had purchased. But as he kissed the book farewell, he happened to touch the page with his tongue.

His teacher was recalled, and the long, arduous process of learning to read with his tongue was started. The last that I heard, this Kansas City man has read the entire Bible through from cover to cover 4 times with his tongue.

Sometimes we don't realize what is of greatest value to us in life until we lose it. Certainly, of all the gifts that we have that are precious to us, among the most valuable of all is the gift of God's inspired Word, the revelation that God has given to us so that we might know His truth.

In Psalm 19, David wrote of the 2 major means by which God has revealed himself to the human race. The first half of the Psalm is devoted to God's manifesting himself through General Revelation- that is through his creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands", David begins, and then he develops that theme throughout the first 6 verses. But then David moves to the 2nd means of God's manifesting himself through Special Revelation. God has revealed himself to the human race in special revelation in various means in past days – revelatory dreams and visions, miraculous acts are all examples of Special Revelation. But by far the greatest Special Revelation that we have been given by God involves the very Word of God. Both the living

Word- the incarnate Son of God who came to this earth as the expressed image of God, and the written word- God the Spirit revealing his inspired message to prophets and apostles who wrote down that God-breathed message in the Scriptures give to us the most complete revelation of God that we now have.

Today, Jesus Christ is no longer walking upon the face of the earth but we still can have an intimate, personal relationship with him because he is a living savior who has called us to himself in a relationship so personal and intimate that it is compared to the relationship of a husband and wife in the Bible. We looked at the value of our relationship with the Living Word last week as we saw the Apostle Paul's priority in knowing Jesus Christ from Philippians 3. Now this week we want to look at the value of the Written Word to us. We have the immense privilege of living in a day when we have the completed canon of Scriptures. This bible is among the most precious possessions that we have- for this Bible contains the very message of God to us.

It certainly does not surprise us then to see David's words that the Words of God as more precious than gold, than much pure gold; and that they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. 19:10

Now why should the Bible be such a precious book to us? I would like you to notice 2 reasons for the precious nature of God's word that David gives to us in this Psalm.

1. First of all, the Bible is precious because of its character. In verses 7-9, David uses 6 words to describe the Holy Scriptures. Notice these with me:

a. the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul- when David speaks of the law of the Lord, he would have had in mind the revelation that God gave to Moses from Mt. Sinai. What a perfect or complete revelation that was concerning our responsibilities to God and to our neighbors. The overall purpose of God's law was not to give us a means whereby we could work for his own salvation, for nobody has ever been able to keep every commandment in the Law, but as the Apostle Paul wrote in the epistle to the Galatians, the law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The law was our teacher to show us our moral weaknesses so that we would then see our need for a Savior. In that way, the law has a part in converting or reviving our souls. As we see God's perfect standards, we then see our own inability to meet those standards in our own strength, and we are driven to change in our direction in life and trust in God who is willing to give to us his righteousness and help us meet his standards.

b. the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple- the term statute actually indicates a reminder or a warning sign. It is rendered warning several times in the Old Testament. It carries with it the idea of a testimony or witness from the prophet that warns concerning certain natural consequences that result when God's laws are violated. David says that God's statutes are trustworthy- they can be counted on. And these statutes or reminders or warnings that God gives to us give wisdom to those who are simple. Those who will listen to God's statutes and heed them will find their lives rewarded with wisdom- they will become wise people. The converse is also true, of course. Those who choose to ignore God's word will be steeped in foolishness.

Censorship on T.V. is a hot item of debate in our nation today. There are those who are concerned about the state of morality in our nation who advocate more stringent lines of T.V. censorship, and there are the T.V. producers who bristle at the thought of having anyone tell them what can and what cannot be aired. In this age of debate concerning censorship and the right of freedom of speech, newspaper columnist Cal Thomas brings out one area of censorship that is often overlooked. Before he was invited to appear on a network news program, Thomas tells how he was instructed by the producer to not use any quotes from the Bible. He could quote any other book or source, but not the Bible. On another occasion, Thomas tells of his being dropped from a morning network show because he would not agree to refrain from any quotes from the Bible. Any other book- but no Bible on T.V. Isn't that interesting? A demand for freedom of speech in all areas of immorality and profanity but an absolute censoring of any words from the Bible. Why? Because the Bible speaks truth, warning against sin, giving wisdom to those who are foolish. Those who are foolish don't want to hear the Scriptures. But to those who are sincerely seeking wisdom, the Bible is the most precious source that they have.

c. David goes on to say the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart- This Hebrew term occurs 24 times in the Old Testament, every instance in the Psalms. It is a general term for the responsibilities that God places on his people. In light of God's character, God requires a certain standard of his people. This is a standard that is morally right. And it is interesting that David says that these precepts that are right give joy to the heart. What inner satisfaction we have as we realize that we are living in a way that is pleasing to our creator. When all is right between God and ourselves, when we sense his face smiling down upon us, we can have true joy in our hearts. This joy comes only as the result of our knowing his precepts- what he expects of us- and our following them in our lives.

d. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes- the Hebrew word translated commands here is literally the word for the terms of a legal contract. When a plot of land was purchased, the mitzwa or terms of the contract were agreed upon. I will do this while you will do that.

So it is in God's word that he reveals the blessings that he will bestow upon his people as they remain faithful in their worship of him. Moses summoned up his great discourse to the children of Israel just before his death that is recorded for us in the book of Deuteronomy by giving the terms of God's agreement with them. If the children of Israel would obey God's commandments, then God's blessing would rest upon them in various ways. But if they violated their contract with God, then God would respond with his chastening hand.

God gives to us the terms of his contract, his covenant in the Bible. These are most enlightening to us, for we then see how God desires for us to deal with him as our Creator. Without God's revelation to us, we would never know this. These commands, the terms of God's contract with us, give insight to us, they give light to our eyes.

e. The fear of the Lord is pure enduring forever- the term "fear" indicates a reverence or respect for God. Remember, each of these terms in the context is used as a synonym for the Scriptures. So the fear of the Lord in this context is used as a title for the revelation of God in his word. Fear is an appropriate synonym to be used for it is

through the Scriptures that we learn the true nature of God. It is through the Bible that we realize the holiness of God. It is only as God reveals himself to us that we learn just how infinitely great he is; how awesome are his attributes. And it is most appropriate as well that David would say that the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever- for it is only as we dwell with God throughout all eternity that we are going to grow in our knowledge and respect for who he is. The Scriptures are indispensable to us, for without them, we would have a distorted view of who God is. We would make up a god of our own imagination. But as we study God's revelation to us, we can truly know who God is; our view of him is purified; and this knowledge that we gain of God will be ours forever.

f. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous- the primary sense of the Hebrew term that is translated ordinances here relates to the governmental process. In most cases in the Old Testament, *mispat* is used of a governmental law that is authorized. It is just a little confusing to us today, for the Old Testament government was not equally divided into 3 branches- the legislative, executive and judicial- as our government is. So when the translators use the term judgment, but they do not intend to indicate that it is just a judicial decision, but rather this term indicates any law enforced by a government.

The implication of David here is that there is an ultimate authority over every human government. That authority is God himself. The Apostle Paul spoke of this concept in Romans 13:1 when he said, "everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." God is the ultimate authority, and his word is the ultimate standard for our lives. Whereas it is possible and all too often it sadly happens where a human legislative body enacts a law that is immoral or unjust to all people, God's ordinances are sure, and altogether righteous.

Happily, we live in a country where our constitution was based upon the moral principles of God's word. Not every Christian is so privileged in the world. And whereas there has been much pressure during the past generation to remove anything that smacks of our Judeo-Christian heritage from our government, the goal of the modern secular humanist can never be realized for our heritage is chiseled into stone. Actually, the only way to remove every visage of our Biblical heritage would be the level all the governmental buildings in the city of Washington D.C. and build them all over again. Across the portico of the Supreme Court building is inscribed in the stone, "Justice, the guardian of liberty." And inside the center of the portico looking down upon every decision that our Supreme Court justices make is a statue of Moses, holding the tablets of the 10 commandments over his head. How would you like to be a Supreme Court justice and make a decision on prayer in our country or the legality of abortion or gay rights and have to look up at that figure of Moses as a silent reminder of the fact that God's law is the ultimate authority? As we move across the street to the Capitol building, in the center of the famous Rotunda, there are 8 huge oil paintings depicting 8 key events in our nation's history. 4 out of the 8 painting portray profoundly Christian scenes. One depicts Pocahontas being baptized as a symbol of her conversion to Christianity. Another portrays the planting of a huge cross to commemorate the discovery of the Mississippi River by the explorer Desoto. Still another depicts

the landing of Columbus with a cross held in the background to dedicate the moment with the implication of thankfulness to God for the safety of the trip overseas. And still a 4th painting shows a group of Dutch travelers preparing for their immigration to the new land. The scene is set in Holland. The people are gathered around a large, open Bible, preparing themselves to set sail to a new world. Then as we would move just off the Rotunda, we would enter Statuary Hall. In this hall, life-size statues of significant citizens have been contributed by all the states. Many of these are dedicated Christians who have filled the heritage of our nation with such rich tradition. Jason Lee, the early missionary to Oregon holding a Bible aloft in his hand. Junipero Serra, another missionary who gave his early missions such Biblical names in Spanish as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento and San Diego. Frances Willard, an associate of Dwight L. Moody. And we could go on and on- key American Christians who were salt and light to their generation.

In the library of Congress, engraved in the wall is a verse from the very Psalm that we are looking at this morning. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork." Ps. 19:1. On another wall is inscribed Micah 6:8. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

And we could go on and on. Heritage. It is engraved in the very walls of our governmental buildings as a constant reminder that the ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. Ultimately, God alone is the source of all true authority.

2. Now having given these 6 terms that describe the character of God's word, David goes on to give 2 consequences of God's word in our lives. We do not have time this morning to develop these as we would like to, but let me just mention them for they also demonstrate the precious of value of God's word to us. They are found in verse 11.

READ Psalm 19:11- By them (the law, statutes, precepts, commands, fear and ordinances of God) is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

We live in a day when we continuously hear a message that is totally contrary to God's word. This message is inviting us to live selfishly to indulge our own desires. This message is that only what we experience here and now matters. The world lures us into immoral thoughts and actions as if nobody will suffer any consequences for them. The world presents its goods and wares to us and claims to be able to satisfy all of our inner needs with them. Put you confidence and trust in me, the world says.

Now if we listen to this message, we are very foolish- for the Bible warns us of its error. If we are wise people, we will study the Scriptures and obey them.

And the wonder of God's love for us is that he not only warns us of those things that are destructive to our lives, but he also promises to reward us for our obedience to Him. "In keeping them, there is great reward." God has every right to demand obedience from us just because he is our creator. God has every reason to expect

obedience from us from a logical standpoint just because obedience to God is in our own best interest. But God's love is so great that he even promises to reward us for our obedience to him.

A couple of years ago, now a former park ranger at Yellowstone Park but then an active ranger was leading a group of hikers through the forest. Another ranger from a fire lookout spotted a large bear in the area, and called to the hiking ranger to warn him of the danger. He kept trying to call, but could not contact him. The grizzly bear who had been stalking the group attacked one of hikers injuring him severely. After the group was rescued, the ranger who was in charge of the expedition was asked why he didn't respond to the radio warnings. His answer was most interesting. He said that he had become so intent in his lecturing about the various wild flowers they were seeing, that he considered the intermittent messages from the radio a distraction. So he had turned off his radio so that he might not be disturbed. And the grizzly bear had attacked them unawares.

Any time we tune out the messages that God has sent to us, we are not only putting ourselves in peril, but we are also endangering all of those surrounding us. God has taken great pains to give to us his message. More than 40 authors, over 1,500 years in the making. This book is very important to God. And it should also be very important to us for it is among our most precious possessions.