

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY

Speaker: Prof. Joseph John

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Scripture: Psalm 119:65-72, Psalm 19:10-11

Psalm 119:65-72

- ⁶⁵ Do good to your servant
according to your word, O LORD.
- ⁶⁶ Teach me knowledge and good judgment,
for I believe in your commands.
- ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I obey your word.
- ⁶⁸ You are good, and what you do is good;
teach me your decrees.
- ⁶⁹ Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies,
I keep your precepts with all my heart.
- ⁷⁰ Their hearts are callous and unfeeling,
but I delight in your law.
- ⁷¹ It was good for me to be afflicted
so that I might learn your decrees.
- ⁷² The law from your mouth is more precious to me
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.”

Shall we pray?

Lord, our loving Father, we once again come to Your presence. We pray, as we meditate on Your word, that Your Spirit will be our Teacher and You would teach us what You want us to learn and write these truths deep into our hearts. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

I would like to read one more verse to you from Colossians 3:16

“¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

About two weeks ago, we talked about God’s Holy Spirit, and one thing that I shared was: it’s futile to try to live a Christian life on your own; you will never succeed. In fact, you will have more and more guilt. The reason is that it’s not about us; it’s all about God. But the good news is that God has given us divine resources which we should grab or we should invest or to just take it especially the divine resources which we have for our Christian life to grow and to serve the Lord, and to be good stewards of all that God has given us. One of the major resources is God’s Word. Then we have prayer, and then God’s Holy Spirit.

Today we will look more at God’s word, and how we can invest more in it. I don’t know if you noticed, but the last verse which I read from Psalm 119, the Psalmist says, “The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.” God’s word was so precious to the psalmist, more than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. That is the point.

I am sure all of you would agree with me that today more than ever, we have God’s word available in plenty. We all have multiple copies of bibles and we have Bible apps on our devices too. At home, as well as at my office, I have several bibles and even a couple of New Testaments. And we are so rich. The point is unfortunately as human beings, when something is there in plenty, we kind of

disregard it. That is our human nature. When something is not available, we consider it very precious. And unfortunately, I believe today, that may be true about God's word. This is something we can check our own hearts. But even today, there are many countries in the world where God's word is precious. Why? because it is not available. It is confiscated, a banned book. You can't carry it with you. So much so that believers memorize and recite whatever they learned. Not too long ago, when entering some countries, if you had a bible in your baggage, you could be punished. Your baggage was checked for bibles. Can you believe that happening in the 21st century? But we are so lucky we have so many copies of bibles. Is it precious for us?

1. What are the benefits of having God's word richly in our lives?

A) God has revealed Himself through His Word.

We should read or study or memorize God's word because God has revealed Himself through His Word. If we did not have God's word, we would not have known about God's character and what God expects from our lives, and so on. The bible was written over a period of 1600 years by 40 authors, but there is a single theme threaded through all of it. The Old Testament is looking towards Jesus Christ, and in the New Testament, it is Jesus and the gospel. Right from Genesis to Revelation – one theme.

Most of us have had the privilege of being brought up in a Christian family, so right from our childhood we have the benefit of hearing God's word. But for many, that is not true. You might know about Gideon's International; their ministry is to plant or keep a bible in every hotel room. Many, many people have come to Christ just because of that bible. They found Him. I am aware of many people, just by reading a portion of the Bible have come to Christ. That's the power of God's word. Even to people who had no access to the bible, just by reading God's word, God's Spirit could work in their life and that completely transformed their life.

John 3:16 – a verse which clearly tells about God's love which touched many hearts who never knew God. "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

B) We need God's promises.

As we go through the challenges of the day, and there are plenty of those, we all need God's promises. That is why God has given us His Word so that we can dwell on His promises. For example, Psalm 119:68 "You are good and what You do is good, teach me your decrees." When we go through tough times, and I'm sure all of us have our own dose of problems, we need to remind ourselves that's God's promise, that He is good and all that He is doing is good. On a day to day basis, we need to remind ourselves of such promises and assurances from God. Once such promise is "Fear not, I am with you."

C) Loving God means loving His Word.

Again, we know this commandment: The greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength. But how do you do it? One such way is to love God's word. You would all agree with me, if you love somebody, we would like to spend some time with that person. So if you really love God, then that would automatically translate in terms of spending time in God's word. I think that's a good barometer for all of us. Do you really love reading God's word? Do you really long to read and spend time? That's a good check of how our love of God is.

D) We all need encouragement.

We very seldom get encouragement. There are people who flatter us and we all know why. very few people who would encourage us, to help us in our walk with the Lord. the bible is full of that. I know many times when somebody comes to me and shares their problems with me, I immediately pray asking God to give me one word, some promises, some encouragement from His Word. And God always gives it, and that serves the purpose. God's word is full of promises, full of encouragement so that we can go through this life the way God wants us to.

E) God's Word is like a mirror.

James 1 says so. I'm sure all of us today stood in front of the mirror for some time. why? we want to see how our face is and we want to adjust our hair or whatever. But James says: When you read God's word, it's like standing in front of a mirror. When we stand in front of a mirror, we know how our face looks and what all adjustments we need to do. Exactly the same thing is about God's word. When you read God's word, it's meant to show us the real us so that we can make changes in our lives. Always remember that the reason you read the bible is not for knowledge but that it will help us to transform, change. That should be our regular prayer: Lord, when I read Your word, change me, transform me, change my attitudes, my actions, my reactions; all of them Lord, change me.

F) For thoroughly equipping yourself to fulfil God's call on your life.

We have all taken the trouble to come here because we want to find what God has in store for us, and we want to be equipped for God and His purposes for our lives.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

God's word is God-breathed. God's Holy Spirit is the real author. God's Spirit used different people, inspired them, but at the same time, their uniqueness is there. every book you read – Paul's epistles are very different from Peter's epistles. God's Spirit inspired both of them but used their basic way, their expressions. It was all God-breathed so that it would teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us in righteousness. Why? so that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

G) ROI (Return on Investment) guaranteed.

In God's word, there are many verses which talk on ROI, on investing in God's Word.

Psalm 19:11 By them (that is God's Word) is your servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward.

So listening to God's word and obeying it, there is a ROI.

What should be our attitude when we read or study God's Word?

1 Peter 2:1 "Like new born babies crave spiritual milk."

That should be your attitude, craving spiritual milk, so you can be very sure that your efforts in spending time and effort on God's word will be richly rewarded.

2. Negative Examples.

Some people may read and study the bible but for the wrong reasons. Their motives may be very different.

- **The Pharisees:** They were always there where Jesus was, but for very different reasons. They wanted to catch Jesus make a mistake or slip up. But they were experts in the Law. They knew the Law but it didn't help them. In fact, Jesus said in John's gospel ch.6 – Their problem was they searched the scriptures and studied the scriptures but did not have a love for God, and that made the difference.

Matthew 23:2-3 ² 'The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach.

That last part is very scary. They do not practice what they preach. We need to be careful to practice what we preach. So, the Pharisees were experts in the law but it did not help them.

- **The Sadducees:** They were the people who did not believe in the resurrection. They always had excellent riddles by which to catch out the people who did not know that there was no resurrection. You will remember that they were questioning Jesus about the lady who was married to seven brothers one after the other as they died. Jesus' reply was very interesting, as well as very important.

Matthew 22:29 "Jesus said, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.'"

The Sadducees, experts in the law but in spite of that, they did not know the scriptures.

Looking at these negative examples, we see that it is possible sometimes to have God's Word, but it would not help us if we have the wrong reasons for our beliefs. Always remember the primary reason for reading or studying or meditating on God's word – to change us, transform us. That should be our primary attitude. Otherwise, God's Word is of no value.

3. Positive Examples.

Take for example, King David in Psalm 19:10,

¹⁰ They are ("they" means God's word) more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

For King David, God's Word was more precious than gold, than much pure gold and we saw the same thing in Psalm 119 which was written by someone else.

⁷² The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold."

The issue is: how precious is God's word to you? And there are many positive examples: when we think about Daniel, Nehemiah, Ezra – they all loved God's word and they meditated on it. When we think about the psalms, we only think about King David. But there are many others who wrote psalms (Psalms 73-83), and one such person is Asaph. Psalm 73 especially is very good. Similarly you will find other authors like sons of Korah. All of these people loved the Lord.

I love the Old Testament, because it is a narrative where we see how God worked in those people's lives. that helps me when I see how God helped Daniel or Nehemiah and so on. Similarly the Psalms is a wonderful book. Why? Because we see that while a lot of them are praises, many of them are also prayers. A good number of them are complaints against God. Yes! You can complain to God; that shows how close you are to God and that encourages us to have a close relationship with God, so much so that we can even argue with Him

4. How can we have God's word dwelling in us richly?

A few things we need to know before we answer that question.

- **Redeeming time.**

Today I am sure all of us will agree that the costliest item is time. Very often, we don't spend time reading God's word or studying God's word is lack of time. All of us, be it the Prime Minister of India or the President of the United States of America or a beggar, all are given 24 hours a day only, not one second more, not one second less.

Let me share my own experience also in terms of reading God's word. Earlier we used to live inside IIT campus. It was a luxury to read God's word. I could read a lot of chapters in the morning, but I can't do that anymore. Now we live outside the campus; I now understand the Mumbai traffic. I have to time my going to office. So my whole reading of the bible got disturbed because things have changed. But recently I've found something very interesting – I have plenty of time in the afternoons, and that is when I spend time reading God's word. We have to figure out the best time – redeem time. You will not get time; you have to take time. and we do that for things which are important. Would you please do an audit of your time? You will find there are slots which are not used profitably and we need to because we can't afford to lose God's word.

- **Pray.**

Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law." Don't ever start reading or studying God's word without praying first. God's Spirit needs to change us. Many times, we find that we are reading the Word but nothing seems to be going in because our mind is elsewhere. We need to have God open our eyes so that then we can see.

Now, to answer the question "How can we have God's word dwelling in us richly? There are four major areas:

Reading:

Make sure you have a regular plan. Don't read the bible randomly. If you are prepared to read about 3.3 chapters a day or about 100 chapters a month, you can finish the whole bible in one year. But maybe you don't have time; it's okay. You can halve the number of chapters in a month and finish in 1½ years. Or even if you read only one chapter a day and finish it in 3 years. But follow whatever is comfortable. But make sure that you have a good mix of the Old Testament and the New Testament and the Psalms. Always. Don't start reading from Genesis and stop at Revelation. Never do that. There are lot of good Bible reading apps. For the past 10 years I have been using my own plan. I read one portion of the New Testament and two portions of the Old Testament and usually finish in about a year. I have been so blessed.

But let me warn you – when you read the bible, the purpose is finally to change us, to transform us. To do that you need to reflect on God's word. Apostle Paul tells this to Timothy many times: reflect on what I am saying; reflect, think.

Studying:

I'm sure all of us know the difference between reading and studying. Studying is a more deeper, committed exercise than reading. You can do a personal study of the bible on your own (even with the help of apps), or you can study as a group. Studying God's word as a group is wonderful as you can learn from each other. But make sure that you study God's word.

Memorizing:

Memorizing God's word is a lost art. Interestingly, our own country is famous for this oral tradition. You might wonder how Moses could write Genesis in so much detail. That is because of oral tradition of passing down information from generation to generation. The technology of writing on parchment or on leather came much later.

All of us are capable of memorizing. If you say you can't, I would ask you what is your mobile number. I'm sure you know it. Why? Because we have to repeat it again and again and again. as we get older it becomes more difficult to memorize things as compared to when we were younger. But the trick is to go over it again and again, and it will become a part of you. If you find it difficult to

memorize, read it ten times a day; without your knowledge, in a week's time that portion is memorized irrespective of your age. So there is not excuse not to memorize.

By God's grace, I memorized a lot of verses when I was young, and praise God, it's helping me tremendously at the right time. When I need encouragement, or even when I need correction, God's word comes to mind and tells me where I am wrong. Let me warn you – today we are all comfortable with our bibles. Nobody knows what will happen. Can you be 100% sure that five years from now, you will be allowed to keep the bible with you? Don't assume. That was the scenario in Eastern Europe just thirty years ago. The bible was a banned commodity then. There are many countries in the world today where the bible is not allowed. This is why memorizing God's word is so important. How much of God's word will be in you if you don't have the bible in you? I hope I have been able to encourage you to memorize God's word. Try at least one verse a week.

Meditation:

Psalm 1:2 "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law, he meditates day and night." This is about a righteous man.

Joshua 1:8 "Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. then you will be prosperous and successful."

What is Christian meditation? I'm quoting from the website of Our Daily Bread, and I liked it very much.

Biblical meditation is pondering the words of Scripture with a receptive heart, trusting the Holy Spirit to work in you through those words.

In other words, some of you may be familiar with the idiom 'chewing the cud'. When a cow finds grass, it keeps on eating and this grass goes to one particular stomach. But when the cow is resting, what it does is it will bring back the food from the stomach to the mouth and it will chew and chew. Then it goes to the real stomach. The point is meditation is something like that. You have read God's word but you don't have the time to reflect on the word and see how it applies to you, in what way it can change your life. That is what Christian meditation is all about – prayerfully reflecting and applying it in your life.

In closing, once again I would like to encourage all of us to invest heavily on God's word, in terms of reading, studying, memorizing and meditating. Let it be true for us that God's word is more precious than much pure gold as the psalmist wrote in Psalm 119. "God's word is so rich, richer than pure gold."
