

World's Most Valuable  
Andrew Kneeland, March 21, 2021

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What's the longest chapter in the Bible? Anyone know? Psalm 119!

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, with 176 verses. That's a lot, isn't it! You might be thinking, that's too long. Why didn't the author just break up all those verses into, I don't know, five or six or ten other Psalms?

But Psalm 119 is actually one of the most interesting chapters in the Bible. It's an acrostic poem! There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and in Psalm 119 there are 22 sections, one for each letter. And each verse within a section starts with the same letter.

Of course, that's in Hebrew. We speak English, and our Bibles are in English, so we lose out on a lot of that beauty and sometimes miss the author's original intention. This author, probably David, is writing this long acrostic poem about one thing: the Word of God. And he wants his readers to think about the completeness of God's Word -- so he's covering it from A to Z, from Aleph to Tav.

The section of this Psalm that we're looking at today is the second section, all of these verses start with the Hebrew letter "bet," the second letter of the alphabet. And this section of Psalm 119 is trying to teach us one thing: that God's Word is valuable.

That might seem obvious, right? If I asked you, "Is God's Word valuable?" none of us would say no. I'm sure every one of you would say "Yes, absolutely it's valuable." We'd all say that... but would we mean it?

Do you *really* think that God's Word is valuable? Think about that for a second, because we're going to come back to it.

For now, though, let's actually look at these verses in this book that claims to be so valuable.

<sup>9</sup> How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. <sup>10</sup> I have tried hard to find you— don't let me wander from your commands. <sup>11</sup> I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. <sup>12</sup> I praise you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. <sup>13</sup> I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us. <sup>14</sup> I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches. <sup>15</sup> I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. <sup>16</sup> I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word.

*Father God, this is YOUR Word. YOU'RE the one who claims that these words are valuable, so help us to see their value today. Guide us as we look at the text, and help us apply it to our lives. We give you the praise and it is in your name that we pray, amen.*

Why is the Word valuable? Verse nine starts off this section by establishing a theme: A Word-saturated life leads to PURITY.

God is very concerned about *purity*. Pure is what he is and pure is what he does and pure is what he requires. But what is purity? What does it mean to “be pure”? I think a lot of the time we think of “purity” in a sexual context. And it certainly does mean that... to be pure is to keep yourself clean from sexual sins. But there’s much more to purity, isn’t there?

We’ve got three kids and we live in less than 800 square feet, so our living room is always littered with toys and crafts and dishes and laundry and whatever Arlo drags from room to room. Kids make messes, which is good. That’s what they’re supposed to do. But we try to clean up, and have the kids help us clean up, every evening before bed. Sometimes, I’ll ask the kids to pick up the toys and put them away in the playroom. And they do it so quickly. But when I look into the playroom... they didn’t actually put anything away, they just chucked everything in there and closed the door. That’s not cleaning, that’s just rearranging and hiding the mess.

Living a pure life doesn’t mean hiding your sin. It doesn’t mean rearranging your sin so that nobody else can see it, or so that it’s just shoved into the corner of your life. That’s not purity, that’s still impurity. It’s dirtiness, or sinfulness.

It is so easy for us to sit here on a Sunday morning and think about all the sinful things that we shouldn’t do, that we shouldn’t have done, or that we shouldn’t be doing. We know what’s right and what’s wrong, we’ve heard Bible stories and lessons for years, all of us. We know that lying, gossip, and cursing are bad... We know that stealing and cheating and lusting are sinful... we know envy and disrespect and not treating others the way we want to be treated is wrong. But if we *know* what is sinful... why do we always keep doing it? Why can’t we be PURE?

Well over a hundred years ago Bible teacher Alexander Maclaren said: “The world is a great deal fuller of inducements to do wrong than of inducements to do right... a great many bad things have a deceptive appearance of pleasure, a great many circumstances in which it seems far easier to follow the worse (course) than to follow the better course.” Not much has changed in 100 years, has it? If anything, the devil and the world have learned even better ways of

dressing up evil and sin to make them look appealing.

But the way of sin leads to death. Any plan you make or goal you have that isn't CENTERED on God and His Word will ALWAYS fail. JESUS is the bread of life, not that motivational self-help book you're reading. JESUS is the water of life, not that iPhone game you spend six hours a day playing. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing..." what? The praise and compliments of your friends? Does faith come by hearing a happy political news report? No! Faith comes by hearing the WORD of GOD. The Word of God is how we are saved.

So let me ask you again... Is God's Word valuable? It's the most valuable thing in the world, isn't it? That really helps explain verse 14, doesn't it? "I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches."

An impure life leads to ruin. A life apart from God and apart from His Word leads to broken families and wrecked relationships. It leads to failure and embarrassment. It leads to death. An impure life, a sinful and unrepentant life leads to death. And not just death, but a *forever* dying. An eternal and constant *dying*, which is agonizing and torturous and miserable. But... the Word brings us PURITY. The Bible says in 1 John: "God is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

A Word-saturated life, a life that is spent with the Word of God close-by and consistently opened and regularly read, a Word-saturated life leads to what? Purity. It leads to a life free from the destructive habits of sin and evil... and an eternal life spared from the result of sin. The wages of sin is death... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Psalmist is right... God's Word IS valuable. We'd all agree. But do we REALLY think so? Do we act as if the Bible is a valuable thing? Do you "praise the Lord for His decrees?" Do you "rejoice in God's laws as much as in riches?" Do you "delight in God's decrees?"

If we seriously look at our lives... I think many of us would find that we DON'T live as if God's Word is valuable.

What are we doing here? Why are we here this morning? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Why did you come to church this morning? Is it because you like all of us and enjoy getting to see us every week? I hope it's true! Or is it because you love these songs and this

liturgy? I hope that's true, too!

But what's the main reason you're here this morning? I suspect that for most of us... the reason we're here right now is because church is simply what we do on Sundays. This is what we do, we come to church and then we go home.

It's the easiest temptation in the world for us to be complacent about church and the Bible. Especially as Americans.

In the country of Laos—a long, narrow country just south of China—just a few weeks ago a family of five was arrested and fined for holding Christian meetings in their home. Another family in Laos, a young couple with one small child, recently became Christians but were immediately forced out of their village as a result. In Ethiopia a church was burned down and the homes of all of its members were looted. The government response was that they shouldn't have been preaching the Gospel. The day after that church burned to the ground, the members met there to spend time thanking and praising God.

These aren't stories from centuries ago, "way back in the days of Roman persecution." This is happening right now. Right now - Sunday morning - there are groups of people gathering together, just like this. They're gathering together, singing and praying together, reading God's Word together... but there's a difference between them and us. If they're caught, they could be killed. But still they meet. They live their lives as if this book is valuable. Do we? We should!

There are people in the world today who would cry if they knew how much time your Bible spent on the bookshelf. If they knew how *rarely* it was opened. God's Word is valuable!

God's Word is valuable because it creates and nurtures our faith and it leads us to purity. But don't leave church today depressed. Because this is actually an ENCOURAGING text for us today.

Why? Because this is good news! Salvation isn't something you need to sweat hard to earn. Saving faith isn't something that you need to work relentlessly to achieve or search far and wide to find. It IS HARD WORK... but not YOUR hard work. Jesus did the hard things we couldn't even hope to do.

Jesus said in John 6:29 that YOUR BELIEVING in Him is the work of God. It's not your work. It's

something God works in you. And it's something that God through His Word strengthens and maintains and preserves. Your faith is a gift.

And because of this gift of faith, worked by God through this valuable Word, we respond as believing and saved children of God. We respond in faith and love to God, and we respond by being obedient to His Word.

As believing and saved Christians, then, who want to be obedient, we've got some work to do on our lives. Don't we? We've got some habits that we need to break and some habits that we need to form. But we're not alone in this struggle... this sanctification is fueled by the same God that brought us to faith. It's spurred on and driven by this same, valuable Word that we're talking about today.

Listen to this encouraging Word from Jesus in John 15. He said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ALREADY you are clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

God's Word is valuable. If you believe and have been baptized then you are ALREADY CLEAN because of the cleaning and purifying power of this Word of God. And now we abide with Christ, the true vine. We let Christ grow beautiful, healthy fruit through us... which is obedience to God and love to our neighbors. It's hard work! Even a healthy branch needs to be painfully pruned in order to grow even more beautiful fruit.

But we delight in God's Word because it IS valuable and worthy of our praise. This valuable Word creates faith in our hearts, protects our faith through doubt and difficulty, and it prunes us and molds us into pure and godly children of God.

We're going to close today by doing something a little different. Let's turn in your bulletins to the Psalm responsive reading again. This Psalm says that we should hide God's Word in our hearts and that we should read God's Laws out loud, so that's what we're going to do.

Let's read responsively, Psalm 119:9-16.

Amen.