

A box of delights

Readings: Psalm 119:9-24 and Romans 7:21-8:11

Let us pray: We base our prayer on the words from Psalm 119 v18

Father God, open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of Your law, let Your truth shine into our darkness, bring Your love for us into sharp focus and may Your Spirit of truth hover over us, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

What things in life do you delight in?

Some excellent choral music?

A walk around a lovely English garden, like Wisley?

The sight of some roses with raindrops on them?

The simple delicacy of fuchsia flowers?

The symmetry and detail of a gerbera flower?

Or the delight of raising plants like this from seed?

Or perhaps it is the great outdoors, the majestic mountains?

The sea on the West Coast?

A walk in the bush at Lake Rotoiti?

A glorious sunset?

All of these are delightful, some resonate more with us than others, we all have our individual preferences. All of these things we have looked at are good and a cause for thanksgiving and praise to God the great Creator.

But this morning I want to direct your attention to a number of delights within the word of God, our Bible. I begin with the word of God itself, which we are to delight in. We had it in our reading but it is not just a Psalm 119 thing. For example Jeremiah says “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.” (Jer. 15:16).

But turning back to Psalm 119, where throughout this psalm the writer declares his delight in the word of God no less than eight times. It is his delight, his joy and pleasure. One commentator suggests that delight in v16 means in Hebrew to skip about and jump for joy. This I find interesting, as at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews celebrate the finishing and the renewal of the annual Torah reading cycle from Genesis 1 to Deuteronomy 34 in their holiday of *Simhat Torah*. There are processions around the synagogue carrying Torah scrolls and plenty of high-spirited singing and dancing in the synagogue with the scrolls. They literally do wholeheartedly delight in the word. In the synagogue, of course this would be largely men!

But getting back to Psalm 119, it is arranged as an acrostic psalm, with each section of eight verses beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Derek Kidner has a lovely description of this psalm. He says the psalm uses eight synonyms for God’s word of

Scripture, like eight bells which are used to ring the changes on them through the psalm. In English, the eight words are often translated as law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, ordinances, word and promise. We had two sections of the psalm read to us in our OT reading. In the first section we read that the writer has stored up God's word (v11), he has committed it to memory, he speaks out God's word (v13), he delights in obeying God's word (v14), he will meditate on God's words, turns them over continually in his mind, he will not let the word of God slip and forget it (v16), In the second section he asks that he might live to be obedient to the word (v17), to see wonderful truth in God's word (v18) and not to have the truth hidden from him (v19), he will not wander from the word but keep it, meditate on it and delight in it because its teaching is true and trustworthy for life (19-24). The second section ends with "Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counsellors". (v24). As Proverbs tells us "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety." (Prov. 11:14) The words of God are our counsellors, or policymakers or as Jerome puts it our "best friends". All of course linking back to v 9 How can anyone keep his way pure? "By guarding it according to your word." Your counsel I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You (v11). This is why the Psalmist delights in the words of God. It's not just the delight of the scholar, although for some that can be an incredible delight, but it is the delight of the disciple – now I know how to follow – Your word is the lamp for my feet (v105).

George Whitfield had these words to say on the Scriptures – "Search, therefore, the scriptures, my dear brethren; taste and see how good the word of God is, and then you will never leave that heavenly manna, that angel's food, to feed on dry husks, that light bread, those trifling, sinful compositions, in which men of false taste delight themselves: no, you will then disdain such poor entertainment, and blush that yourselves once were fond of it. The word of God will then be sweeter to you than honey, and the honey-comb, and dearer than gold and silver; your souls by reading it, will be filled as it were, with marrow and fatness, In short, you will be guided by God's wisdom here, and conducted by the light of his divine word into glory hereafter." Not perhaps how we might phrase it today, especially with our plethora of means of communication we have in our day compared to the 18th century, but just hear and catch Whitfield's passion for the word of God.

Several years ago I preached a sermon on "The Bible – treasure or not" and spoke about the importance of reading the whole Bible through from Genesis to Revelation. One of the main themes of modern biblical studies is the emphasis on God's whole redemptive plan. It is only by reading the Bible through in this way that we can grasp the full vision of what God has laid out in His word. It needs perseverance, and it is easy to get bogged down, in for example Leviticus or Job, and give up, but just keep on going, for the rewards are great. There is an encouraging short article entitled 7 tips for reading through the Bible in a year on the web.

(Copy and paste the address into your browser)

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/7.tips.for.reading.through.the.bible.in.a.year/103296.htm>

So if we delight in the word of God, it is hardly surprising that we are to delight in God Himself, the author of His word, our second delight. Psalm 37:4 tells us "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." As we delight in His word in

order to be obedient, so we delight in God who has set His love upon us. We surely have a reference to Psalm 119 in Paul's words in Romans 7 "I delight in the law of God in my inner being" (v22). But Paul confesses a struggle between his higher desires to serve God and the sin within him which works in the opposite direction. If this is all there is to the Christian life then what a wretched existence. But Paul doesn't stop there he goes on to Romans 8. As Tom Wright says about the end of Romans 7, "When God gave the Torah his intention was to further the purposes for which he called Israel. These purposes were not simply about teaching the world a better standard of morality. They were about rescuing the world from sin and death. To accomplish this aim, God sent not just His Torah, but also His Son and His Spirit, to do at last what the Torah wanted to do but by itself could not. At which point we turn over the page, ready at last for one of the greatest chapters written by Paul, or any other Christian writer". So Paul begins Romans 8 with "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1-4) He goes on to say if you are a Christian then God's Spirit dwells within you, that same mighty Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Isn't that something to delight in, the works and provision of a faithful God towards those who by His grace are in Christ Jesus?

Now we turn to our third delight, which we find in Psalm 16 v3.

"As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight." We are to delight in our fellow Christians. For some, their fellow Christians have caused them the most pain and disappointment in their lives, so this verse is a particular challenge. One of the reasons we are so upset when our fellow Christians fail us is that we expect so much from them, we expect them to be perfect, even when we ourselves would be the first to admit our own failings. Once we become Christians we are born into a new family, the family of God, the household of God. Our fellow Christians are related to us, not by virtue of genes but by virtue of the Spirit of God who indwells every Christian. This is what gives us our true unity, we share the same Spirit. It is vital for each individual to know God's love, but we also need to realise that we are part of the body of Christ. We are linked to one another like the parts of a body. Our current world emphasises me, me, me; its cult is the individual who chooses their own friends, and drops them when it suits them – so our attitude to our fellow Christians of delight is strangely countercultural.

Nevertheless, this verse remains a challenge for many of us. Do we delight in our fellow Christians?

For some the previous delight was a hard sell but my next delight might be an even harder sell.

Isaiah 62:4-5 "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

The Lord delights in you. I think many of us struggle with this one. Yes we know God loves us, or at least we kind of accept the love that God has for us, but we would hesitate to go so far as to say He delights in us. Largely I think because we know our own failings and failures, we doubt that God could ever really delight in us. Yet cast your minds back to Susan's sermon last week, I think Jesus was delighted in the nameless woman who washed his feet with her tears, because her tears came out of her love. You see delight is part of love, we delight in those we love, and God who is love, does the same. That is not to say that God is delighted in everything we do or fail to do, but He delights in us, like a Father with His children. Yes, like any father, He delights to see us realise the greatness of His love for us, He delights to see us adoring His Son, He delights to see us stepping out in faith but at heart He delights in us because He loves us – His delight does not depend upon what we do, because God is a God of grace.

The title of my sermon was “A box of delights” and we have not had time this morning to open all the delights in the Scriptures. Just open your concordance or your Bible app on your phone and see what other delights are there. In the meantime just ponder the delights of God's word, God himself, His people and the fact that God delights in you. And if you find yourself questioning whether you would include one or all of these in your list of delights, then ask God by His Spirit to open His box of delights to you. Amen.

Sermon questions:

- 1) What things or people give you delight? Take a moment to thank God for them.
- 2) Do you delight in the word of God? If not, what prevents you?
- 3) Do you delight in God? If not, why not?
- 4) Do you delight in the people of God? If not, what barriers are there?
- 5) Do you believe that God delights in you? If not, what is holding you back?