

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Psalm 119:97-104 at Victory of the Lamb on August 31, 2014.

Series: Saturate
Today's Focus: Meditatio

“Sweeter Than Honey...Chew on This!”

Hello Friends, when I was in high school, after a long day of class followed by football practice followed by homework...I ended almost every day by drinking a couple sodas and eating a bag of barbeque potato chips. Before I knew it, this became my regular habit. I just sort of fell into it I guess. Now were these the kind of calories that my body needed? Probably not! I wish I'd have known then what I know now about how much better my body feels when I have a fruit smoothie with some whey protein mixed in it instead of a couple cans of Orange Crush and a bag of KC Masterpiece potato chips. Because the smoothie makes me feel so much better than the soda. You know what I mean? I've learned that what you put into your body has an impact on what you get out of it and how you feel. Now this isn't an infomercial for a smoothie maker. It's just basic nutrition. But I think it's a helpful introduction to the big idea behind this series we've called Saturate.

You see, the big idea is that what fills our hearts and our minds, leads our lives. In other words if we can find out how to fill our hearts and minds with God's goodness, then our souls are going to spiritually thrive, and we're going to see blessings spill over into our lives. The alternative is what happens if we let our emotions and thoughts become saturated with anger or resentment or jealousy or images of pornography or violence or greed or things like that. If we let our hearts be saturated with sin it's only a matter of time before our faith grows stagnant and our souls suffocate. So which do you want for yourself? Well of course I'm assuming you want to find out how you can thrive, right? How you can enjoy the blessings of God!

That's why over the three weeks of this series we're learning how to put into practice three important spiritual disciplines that God uses to saturate us with his goodness. Martin Luther once identified these three things as *Oratio*, *Meditatio*, and *Tentatio*. Of course the important thing isn't whether you remember these fun Latin words but that you learn to apply what these words mean. Last week we talked about *Oratio* which is basically prayer or talking with God. Except that we learned that *Oratio* is really about having a two way conversation with God. It's about talking to God—just spontaneously, freely, throughout the day. We learned we can just weave simple from-the-heart petitions throughout our everyday life. But *Oratio* is also about taking the time then to listen to what God has to say to us. And the place we go to hear God's voice is in his word—the Bible. And so in a natural way then, *Oratio* leads us to what we're going to talk about today which is *Meditatio*—or meditation.

Now let me just say this... I'm guessing when you hear me say that we're going to talk about meditation, many of you are thinking, “Come on man, like I've got time for that!” Am I right? “Or come on Pastor Ben, that sounds incredibly boring!” I mean aside from some of the new age philosophies that are out there, we don't exactly live in an age where people are all-in with meditation, do we? I'm sure you've all noticed. Everybody's in a constant hurry, right? I sure feel like I am sometimes. And so it's hard to hold our attention. We're easily distracted. We all want to be entertained. Movies and video games need to have lots of action. Sports stadiums are trying to figure out how to offer multiple screen experiences while at the stadium because just watching what's going on the field isn't enough for people anymore. God forbid anyone is bored. So our fantasy football stats are changing

constantly in real time and we can check them on our phone. Our twitter feeds are constantly updating every second. Our Facebook news feeds are refreshing constantly. Everything is trying to grab our attention as life just rushes by in a blur.

And then there's Psalm 119. It's long. It's repetitious. It's been around about 3,000 years or so. And it still says the most counter-cultural things. It says things like how happy you will be if you obey God's commandments. It says how blessed you will be if, when you experience challenges in life, you turn to God for help. It says how wonderful it is to fill your heart and mind with God's Word. That it's worth our time. That it's worth our attention. That it's worth meditating on...which I'm guessing you already actually know how to do. "Well, what do you mean, Pastor Ben? You're saying I already know how to meditate?" Yep, because listen carefully. If you know how to worry, you already know how to meditate. Anyone here know how to worry about stuff?

I mean when you worry about stuff, what's that like? You've got some thought that keeps running through your mind, right? Morning, noon, and night you can't escape that thought. You're worried about something. You're worried about someone. Or you've got some feeling that just keeps blindsiding you at random times throughout the day. Sometimes even it just hangs around for a while, right, like a monsoon in your mind? That's what worrying is like. You got this worry and you mull it over from every angle, you look at it every which way, you try and figure it out, and you're constantly thinking about it, right? It saturates you. "Well, ok, Pastor Ben, I get that's what worrying is like, I'm pretty good at that, but how exactly is meditating like that?"

Well here's the thing. What if you could just replace your recurring worried thought with a recurring word of God? Replace worrying with meditating. I'm talking about taking a portion of God's Word and letting it saturate your soul. You see meditating is taking a portion of God's Word, a bit-o-God's Word, and doing with it what a dog does with a bone. You gnaw on it all throughout the day over and over again until you get off of there every last little bit of meat. Meditating is taking a portion of God's Word and doing with it what you do with a piece of gum. You chew on until you get out of it every last bit of flavor. Meditating is taking a portion of God's Word and doing with it what you do with a piece of candy like a jolly rancher. You suck on it until you dissolve out of it every last bit of sweetness. What if you developed the practice of replacing worrying with meditating on God's Word? Listen to what the Psalmist says to us in Psalm 119...

⁹⁷ *Oh, how I love your law!*

I meditate on it all day long.

Do you think this means he's just got his head in the clouds ("la la la") and he must not be having to deal with the real world? No. He's just talking about letting God's Word saturate his thinking as he deals with the real world all day long.

⁹⁸ *Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies.*

⁹⁹ *I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.*

¹⁰⁰ *I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.*

¹⁰¹ *I have kept my feet from every evil path*

so that I might obey your word.
¹⁰² *I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.*
¹⁰³ *How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!*
¹⁰⁴ *I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.*

So what is this saying? It's saying that the person who follows the simple truths of God's Word is wise. In fact the person who follows the simple truths of God's Word has more insight and understanding than the person who follows the most sophisticated philosophies of human beings. So the student who listens to God's Word is wiser than the professor who criticizes it. The person who holds to God's Word will never be out of date. This person has greater wisdom than both the traditionalist who clings to worn out notions and also the novelty seeker who chases the latest fads. Because the person who meditates on God's Word is taught by God, they have the greatest wisdom. God's Words to them are sweeter than honey.

Sweeter than honey. That's really saying something, you know. That was the sweetest thing they had back then.
¹⁰³ *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* God's Word is pleasant. It's good. It brings a twinkle to your eyes. But what does this mean for you, huh? Let me go back to the first verse I read today. Didn't you want to know how the Psalmist could start out today by saying, ⁹⁷ *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.* I love...your law? What's he mean?

Friends, remember something we learned last week. In Psalm 119 there are 8 different words used as synonyms for what we'd call God's Word. "Law" is one of them. So also precepts, statutes, decrees, etc. So when the Psalmist says, "Oh how I love your *law*" ... what he's saying? He's not just saying, "Gimme some more rules to follow and obey, I love trying hard to toe the line." No, he's saying more than that. I mean he doesn't begrudge God's for giving him some rules to obey. In fact he actually now find delight in them even as guidelines for his life because he sees them as ways God is trying to help steer us from pain and self-inflicted suffering. Because why does he really love God's law?

Because in God's law he learns about God's love. "Law" here in Psalm 119 is a broad meaning word that means instruction or teaching. It's simply a synonym for God's Word. He loves God's Word because it's God's Word that teaches and assures him over and over how much God loves him. No matter how far he has tried to get away from God, yet even that far God has kept on pursuing him with his mercy and forgiveness and love to get him back. This is why he says that God's Word is sweeter than honey. There is no sweeter message in all of history than that part of God's Word called the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that God in love entered our story as one of us. That Good News that God in love in the person of Jesus Christ came to rescue us from despair, to rescue us from ourselves, to conquer our deepest fears, to overcome our greatest worries by defeating death itself. It is the Good News that God has already forgiven our sins for Jesus' sake who suffered on the cross in our place. The Good News is that God has additionally made many promises for us...promises scattered all throughout his Word that God wants us to read, and to study, and to meditate upon so that we can be blessed as his Spirit makes those promises to saturate our hearts and minds and spill over into our lives.

So *Oratio* is when we call out to God in our need and pray. It's a way God draws us near to him ("Talk to me!") and to experience how near he is to help. *Meditatio* is when we draw near to God's Word and make it a regular part of our thinking. Now maybe you're wondering, "Well this is where Pastor Ben is gonna tell us to go home and meditate more"? I mean wouldn't that be helpful of me? "Now y'all just go home, and start meditating, everybody." But that probably wouldn't be all that helpful I'm guessing.

So today I want to get very practical with you and make this as helpful as I can. And helpful I think often means memorable. Because I truly believe that *Oratio* and *Meditatio* are two of the most important things you can ever learn to do. And next week Nathan Loersch our student assistant is going to tell you that if you learn how to put into practice *Oratio* and *Meditatio*, then when you face *Tentatio*, or faith challenges, you will have the tools to get through those challenges and ultimately be stronger for them. But this'll take some effort. These are disciplines God wants you to learn. Like we talked about last week...bad habits are easy to fall into, right? Good habits on the other hand take intentionality. They take effort. But they're worth it! These things we're talking about in this series are worth it because God's Word is sweeter than honey.

So I've got something for you today. Any of you remember the candy Bit-O-Honey? I've got a whole bag of it. Special ordered. You can find anything on the internet. Now if you're allergic to nuts or dairy then you shouldn't take any. I've got Jolly Ranchers for you instead. But you can have some candy on your way out today. There are going to be two big bowls full of this candy on the way out. Please take some. But then you also have to take the *Meditatio—Chew on This! Challenge*, ok?

Here's what that is. Everybody look at the back of your worship folder, pp. 13-15, way in the back. See where it says on the top of page 13 *Meditatio—Chew on This! Challenge*? Ok then you'll see a football helmet. Below that are the Helmet verses. This is the first category. So on Monday I want you to pick out one of those Helmet verse. Read them all, but pick out one of them to memorize. You see we all need to have a Helmet passage that we have memorized. A go-to passage that reminds us that God protects us. That he is strong for us. So pick one and memorize it. Write it out, read it out loud, say it out loud. Facebook it, tweet it, whatever helps you remember it. And then meditate on it all Monday long. And that's where the candy comes in. Remember that God's Word is sweeter than honey. So get out your candy, suck on it or chew it, and as long as you have that candy in your mouth I want you to think about what that verse means for you. Don't give up on that verse till your candy is gone. Chew on it, ask God to help you understand it. How does it show your sins? How does it show you your Savior? Ask the Holy Spirit to let it saturate your soul and change your heart and mind.

Then on Tuesday do the same thing for an Eraser verse. We all need to have one of those because we're all sinners in need of a Savior. Myself included. Then on Wednesday do the same thing for a Ticket verse. On Thursday it's an Outlet verse. Friday it's a Lemonade verse. Saturday it's a Jimmy V verse. If you don't know who Jimmy V is you're going to have to Google him. But these are the verses that encourage you "Don't give up...don't ever give up!"

And that's maybe a good way to end today. Because friends, at first...*Meditatio* might sound like a big hard scary thing. But it's really not. It's really pretty simple. Put God's Word into your mind and the Holy Spirit will make it saturate your soul. It'll be sweet. Amen.

My Next Steps

Connect: When a book or a movie is really good, we'll read or watch it over and over again. And each time we do so, we'll discover something new that we never noticed before and we'll fall in love with it even more.

Aha: God's Word is like that. The more time we spend with the words, turning them over in our minds and searching for their significance in our lives, the more treasures we discover and the more we grow and are encouraged.

Treasure: *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* (Psalm 119:103)

Challenge: See the back pages (pp. 13-15) for Pastor Ben's *Meditatio-Chew on This!* challenge.

Just a friendly Bible study tip:

If you don't already, try using these meditation questions when reading God's Word: 1. Where do I see my sin? 2. Where do I see my Savior? 3. What will I do differently in response to my encounter with God's Word?