

Transcription of 18GS1059

Mark 12:18-27

"How to Avoid Error"

September 5, 2018

It's great to be here with you guys. Always am honored to be here. Jack is one of my absolute favorite pastors. And so I'm more than happy to fill in when I have the opportunity for sure because this is a great church, and you're all blessed to be here.

Turn in your Bibles to Mark 12. Jesus, as He went through His life during His few years of ministry, was followed by people who had needs. But He was also always followed by people that wanted to argue with Him because the thing that bugged them the most is that He spoke as if He had authority. And that drove the religious leaders crazy because they had worked all their lives to get into a position of authority. And here comes this Jesus - out of nowhere, coming down from the Galilee area from Nazareth - and He doesn't kiss up to them at all. He doesn't seem to ask them any questions. He acts like He just knows what He knows. Imagine that. But that kind of drove 'em crazy. So the Pharisees, for instance, would follow Him; the Sadducees would follow Him; the scribes would follow Him. And they would kind of tag-team, trying to attack Him and make Him look stupid because people liked Jesus. When you feed people from a few loaves and fishes (thousands of people), when you heal people who are sick, people start to appreciate you, and this was something that they couldn't do. But here in Mark 12, we see a few different groups stepping up to try to prove to the people that Jesus wasn't anything special. And, beginning with verse 19, we see the Sadducees take their shot at Him.

We're more familiar with Pharisees than we are with Sadducees. The Pharisees were, to a great extent, the religious teachers, kind of the heart and soul of Judaism at those times. Pharisees were incredibly conservative, rigid, legalistic - kind of like the Baptists of the day, okay? So, no offense if you're a Baptist. I love you. But there you go. (Laughing) The Pharisees were the ones that were constantly criticizing Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath. And He was like, "You'd rather have Me leave them blind or leave them lame than to heal them just because it's the Sabbath?" And then He would make bold claims to them like, "Look, I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. I can do whatever I want on the Sabbath." And for them, that was offensive. Of course, you remember in John 3, when one of the leaders of the Pharisees (Nicodemus) came to Jesus. He came by night, and

Jesus basically told him, "You're a leader of Israel, and I can't believe what you don't know. I can't believe how ignorant you are about the things that you're teaching others. You need to be born again," Jesus told him. But we see the Pharisees constantly, and they're probably the primary drivers who set out to ultimately kill Jesus because nothing is more threatening to a legalistic person who wants things to stay the same as they are than someone who seems to have a freedom that you don't like and you don't want.

Now the Sadducees were a different group. A lot of times Pharisees and Sadducees would work together because both groups agreed that they didn't like Jesus. But they were like night and day difference - Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees were the intellectual elite of their day. If the Pharisees are the hardcore, conservative fundamentalists, the Sadducees were the progressive, liberal commie pinkos. They were the ones who were like (we'll see here, they didn't believe in resurrection) most liberals; ultimately, they didn't believe in much of anything - they didn't believe in heaven, they didn't believe in angels. You wonder why in the world were the Sadducees even religious if they didn't believe in life after death, if they didn't believe in.....basically they were religious atheists. But the reason they did, probably, is because they were professionals. The Sadducees were the Jewish people who claimed to be from the priestly line; we don't know to the extent that they actually were. But they were the ones who were the liaison between the Jewish religious system and the Roman leaders. Remember, at this time Israel is under the foot of Rome. The reason people were excited about a Messiah is they thought the Messiah would immediately set them free from the Roman Empire. Now, Sadducees were highly, highly educated; a lot more than the Pharisees. The Sadducees went to the Yale and Harvard of the day; Pharisees were kind of home schooled. They just had to learn it among their peers and things like that. But because of that, the Pharisees knew what they knew, but they weren't open to any kind of new ideas. The Sadducees believed nothing, but they liked to interact with the politicians. See, the Pharisees looked down on the Romans; hated them, actually. The Pharisees were hoping that Rome would be overthrown. The Sadducees were people who just like, "Hey, let's get along with the government." And when you think about it, if you're liberal enough, and you don't really believe much of anything, what's wrong with the Roman Empire? They were kind of being tolerant of different ideas. And, as long as the Sadducees were still in charge of the Temple, they didn't want to rock the boat, they didn't want to say anything that might make the government mad at them. So you've got Sadducees that are incredibly liberal and kissing up to the government; you have

Pharisees who are anti-government and at the same time, though, really rigid and locked in to their ideas. Pharisees were very superstitious about all sorts of things. Sadducees were like, "No, it's all a joke. Come on." Sadducees were sort of like liberal ministers today, where they stop believing in almost everything. But they went to seminary, and this is their only job so they preach about nothing and act religious, even though the truth is they've rejected most of their religion because of their, in what they perceive as an intelligent, critical approach to life. So this is the liberals - the Sadducees - who now are going to come and confront Jesus. Now their thing that they went after Him on is on the idea of the fact that people rise again. Because Jesus taught a resurrection. Pharisees believed in resurrection; they believed in heaven, they believed in angels, things like that. Sadducees didn't. So the Sadducees wanted to show how stupid and uninformed and ridiculous was this notion. It's kind of funny that Pharisees and Sadducees could get together even though they were so different. At one point, Paul turned them against each other; that was a pretty good tactic.

But here the Sadducees come to Jesus and said, in verse 18, "Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.' " Now this was a usual practice in those days in various cultures, and it was worked in, to some degree, to the Law where the idea is, for them, the only reason to have kids is to pass on your name. And that was the way you lived. In our day and age, offspring aren't as important to us. We like, "I live for me, and I don't care about anybody else." But in their culture, it was a big deal; a bigger deal - what happens to my descendants - than it is what happens to me. It's why they would get excited when God would make promises to them of things that were hundreds of years in the future; where we have more of a tendency to be like, "Tell me about now." And that's the Sadducees also. But they're saying, "Okay, you know how you have that thing where if a guy marries a woman and they don't have any sons....." (daughters didn't count), "then what happens is if he has a younger brother who's never been married yet, he should marry his brother's" - the first guy dies, second guy comes in, marries her, and he would have a kid and name the first kid after his brother because it was a way for his brother's name and thing to continue. So that was a typical thing. So they said, "Yeah, you know how you guys do that? Here's a story."

" 'Now there were seven brothers,' " verse 20. " 'The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.' " So they're saying.....now obviously they're not saying this was an actual story. If the same girl marries seven different brothers, and they all die, I hope somebody investigated her (Laughing). At the very least, sent her to cooking school or something. Somethin's fishy here. And you can also look at this and just think, "These guys are just being ridiculous. This is a stupid thing." But actually, in the classical culture, this was a pretty common method for argumentation. It's taking a situation, something that someone believes, and they call the Latin term for it "*reductio ad absurdum*" - it's the idea of, "Let me take what you believe, and let's carry it out to its ultimate conclusion, and if the ultimate conclusion is absurd, then your assertion is absurd." So for instance, one of the arguments that they would typically do - one of the things that even back then they would argue is whether the earth is a globe, is hanging on nothing, or whether it's flat. Amazingly, people still have that argument. But what they would do is, they said, "If the earth was flat, then people who'd take off in boats or with horses or whatever, they would end up falling off the end of the earth. Because we don't know anyone who has fallen off the end of the earth, therefore it's absurd to believe that the earth is flat. And, as a result, that supports our contention that it's round." So that's the same kind of argumentation. Aristotle made this sort of argumentation really famous. It probably came from Plato and Socrates before him. But Aristotle really honed it to where when Aristotle wanted to make an argument, he always said, "Okay, let's say you're correct. Now let's carry that out to its conclusion, and if the result is absurd, then your contention, your thesis, your hypothesis is absurd." So that's what they're doing. It's actually a pretty sophisticated way of arguing. That's why Jesus doesn't go, "Why are you being idiots?" which is what I would have said if somebody came (Laughing) with a story like this. Or I would just go, "Yeah, well, five seconds after you die, you're gonna find out what flames feel like" or something. But (Laughing) Jesus just listens to it, and He shows....I mean, Jesus didn't have the top education or anything, but He was just a smart guy. When He met with the Jews in the Temple when He was 12 years old, they were like, "I can't believe how smart this kid is." They were asking Him questions.

So naturally He understands the Greek method of argumentation, and it's why so often, when someone asks a question, Jesus responds with a question. Because

that was a favorite tactic also. It was the way (and Socrates is known for that).... they call it the Socratic method where, when you teach, you ask questions and then questions are asked back. They had a great conviction, the Greeks and the Romans did, and apparently Jesus as well, that sometimes questions are way more important than answers. And so you'll see Jesus, when they ask Him a question, often He responds back, and He wasn't mad at them or anything. But they ask their question, and, verse 24, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?' " He goes, "Are you not this messed up? Are you so wrong because you really don't know the Scriptures and you don't know the power of God?" Now, that was a pretty harsh thing to suggest. But, again, He's not saying it; He's just going, "Is this what it is? Is this your problem?" And it was hard for them to know exactly what to say to that because all He's doing is asking a question back. They had asked a question, reduced to its absurdity. Now He's asking them, "Is this your problem? Is this what's going on with you, that you don't know the Scriptures?" Now, for people who had studied the Scriptures greatly, you could easily see that they had issues with the power of God. But the Scriptures? That would probably be taken hard, personally, by them. But then Jesus goes on and expounds on that, and He says, verse 25, " 'For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.' " They didn't believe in angels. So He's kind of teasing them a little bit by throwing that out there.

Verse 26, " 'But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses,' " (they'd memorized the book of Moses, in Torah) " 'in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.' " And then the scribes took a shot at it; the Sadducees were like, "Whoa, that's pretty heavy." See, what He's saying is, "You say you believe the book of Moses, but when God said.....He didn't say 'I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,' or, 'I used to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they died, and now I'm not their God anymore because they don't exist.' " He zooms in on the fact that God said, in the present tense, "I am" (which, of course, was a personal name of God that we call Yahweh or Jehovah). But now He's attacking the essence of who God is and saying, "Don't you hear what He said to Moses, the guy that you venerate, the guy that you look up to? He was the greatest guy ever for our nation, for Israel." And He's saying, "You understand that what God said to him was 'I am' the God of three guys that were dead at that

time? So you're saying God didn't understand? That He somehow believed in resurrection, but you don't?" And so it was like, "Wooooo."

But what I want to focus just a little bit of attention on tonight is Jesus' question to them, "Are you mistaken, because you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God?" I would suggest to you that everyone who's wrong about almost anything - every mistake that's out there, every false religious system that's out there, every cult that's out there, every kook and nut that goes way off in the deep end everywhere, and everyone who rejects Jesus Christ - they have this in common: one or the other, or both of these. They don't really know the Scriptures, and they don't know the power of God. So what does it mean to know the Scriptures? It's something we should do, right? Well, obviously, I mean you're here at church on a Wednesday night while the Dodgers are playing. So for you it's somewhat of a priority, except we heard on the way here they're just getting killed, so (Laughing) some of you maybe made a last-minute decision. But to know the Scriptures, you need to kind of do what we're doing right now; you need to look at it. You don't know the Scriptures if you don't read the Scriptures, if you don't study the Scriptures. And we have so many different ways of doing it - you can hear. My wife listens to the Bible being read on her cell phone when she's going to sleep. There's an audio of somebody reading the Bible. We have radio that goes on just incessantly with people talking about the Scriptures. So obviously, if you literally do not know what the Bible says, that would be a part of what this is. But I think what Jesus is getting at is deeper than that because the fact that He says to "know the Scriptures" implies the idea that Scriptures - the Holy Writ, the Word of God - are something distinct from things that aren't Scripture. So it's not just about, "I know what the Bible says, and I know what every other book says, and I soak up information." Certainly, the Sadducees were familiar with Jewish theology. They were familiar with what the Bible said. But something was missing because, in actuality, they probably thought that people's opinions and other books.....they might say that, "Well, Plato's 'Republic' may be something that we need to read along with this other stuff" or various plays and philosophers and things like that. To know the Scripture means that you know the distinctness of the Scriptures. It's like what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." It's literally.....inspire means to breathe, like respiration means to keep breathing. "All Scripture is inspired by God," God-breathed, "and is profitable." So there is literature that is distinct as Scripture. And if you don't understand that....and Peter also said (2 Peter 1:21) that "the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Spirit of God," carried along by the Spirit of God.

So if you don't believe that the Scriptures are distinct and different than everything else, I would suggest that you really don't know the Scriptures unless you understand that there's a difference between what the Bible says and what you think about what the Bible says. See, if I get up here, and I tell you that, "Here's what the Bible says, and here's my interpretation of it, and if you don't agree with my interpretation of it, you're not listening to God." And let me make it really clear. I absolutely believe in the inerrancy of Scripture - that is that there are no errors in the Scripture. I believe everything in this Book. I believe that the leather's genuine (Laughing). But here's the thing - if I'm going to understand that the Scripture is without error, I'd better have the humility to realize that I am full of error. And I could tell you tonight.....I'll probably say some things, I mean I always say things I shouldn't say, but I can say something that's wrong. But if I say something that the Bible's saying, you can trust that. See, to "know the Scriptures" means that I know the difference between my opinion or my interpretation and what the Scriptures actually say. It's really important for us to have that comprehension; that's a part of.....to me, knowing the Scriptures is knowing the Scriptures are distinct.

But knowing the Scriptures doesn't just mean I know what it says, and I believe it. But knowing the Scriptures also means.....just like knowing a person, you can meet people, or you can be friends with someone on Facebook, kind of know a little bit about them; but if you really know someone, you get to know them in a deeper and more personal way - you interact with them and connect with them. And the Scriptures - it would be so easy if you could do what both the Pharisees and the Sadducees did; just read the Bible, read the Bible, read the Bible, and then you're good. But what Jesus demonstrates here is that it isn't enough to just read it in a cursory way or proof-text it like, "I have a verse for that." But He actually showed that really knowing the Scriptures means that you dig into the Scriptures deeper. Because, think about it here - and I would have never thought.....if I'm like, "Okay, prove the resurrection," I would have never come up with the fact that God said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." We know that passage. We understand the bush was burning. All that. And, "You're on holy ground. Get your shoes off." All that stuff. But notice what Jesus did. He takes that passage, and He zeroed in on the tense of the verb of what God was saying. And that gives us an idea that sometimes we need to not just broadly go through the Bible as fast as we can but that sometimes everything can hinge on a particular detail in a particular passage. There are many times when I've had an idea; maybe I heard a pastor say something or whatever, and maybe I heard myself say it, and then all of

a sudden I notice something in Scripture that contradicts what I always thought, and I'm like, "Whoa, this is an issue." Well, that's the kind of scrutiny, and that's the kind of detail and hard studying that you need to do if you really know the Scriptures. It's one reason why it's way better to listen to Bible studies with people who dig into the Word rather than just to listen to somebody with the same old passages, and it's all kind of geared toward just an altar call and, like, make people, "You just love Jesus." And if we don't treat the Scriptures like they're worth really studying them and really digging into them, we'll fall into all kinds of error. And when you study the Bible in detail, you end up preventing an awful lot of the error that comes up in people's lives. So you look closely at it because it's the Scriptures.

Now the other part of knowing the Scriptures is that not only do you know the distinctiveness of the Scriptures and you study them in detail, and you take them seriously, but you also, when it comes to the Scriptures, either decide that all the Scriptures are the Scripture, or you pick and choose. There are some people who believe some of the Scriptures, and they don't believe in other parts of the Scriptures. If you only believe in some of the Scriptures, you don't believe in the Scriptures at all. Because the Bible sets them off as being distinct and living and, as Paul says (I believe Paul wrote Hebrews), "living and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). The Scriptures - you either take 'em all, or you don't take any. See, because ultimately, if I just decide that some of the Scriptures I believe, some of 'em I like, and some of 'em I just don't like - so I don't talk about that Scripture because I don't know.....Thomas Jefferson - one of the greatest Americans ever, without a doubt, probably singularly responsible for our whole idea of freedom in the early days of our country; but Jefferson, there's a, if you Google it, you can see it - it's called The Jefferson Bible. Thomas Jefferson took gospel, and he cut out every part of it that he thought probably didn't happen. He cut out most of the miracles. It ends with Jesus dying. He cut out the resurrection. And it's like, "Here's my Bible." Well, there's a problem with doing that to the Bible. The Bible has no authority over my life anymore; I have authority over the Bible. I decide, "Oh, I couldn't see Jesus doing that. He probably didn't really say that." And as soon as you do that, you lose it all. Because so much of the value of the Scriptures is in here is something that establishes a standard by which I have to bow; something that I go, "I know that I believe the Word of God. I know that I believe the Scriptures, so I have to believe all of it. Because if I only believe some of it, then all of a sudden I'm the authority; Scripture isn't the authority." We all need something in our lives that tells us how

do we know what's true and what isn't. That's what philosophers call epistemology - the study of truth. It's like, "Okay, when I hear something, how do I know if it's true or not?" Well the Bible is a perfect authority, a perfect epistemology because I can take...now I can interpret it wrong, there's no doubt about it. There are also things in the Bible that I may not understand, but if I start choppin' away at it.....and I've heard people who say, "You really just need to read the gospel of John through Jude. The rest of it you don't need." There's a pastor who.....I have a great deal of respect for him as a communicator, but he's kind of gone off the deep end when it comes to the authority of Scripture. And his name is Andy Stanley. His dad's Charles Stanley, the great Baptist preacher. But Andy, I heard him a couple years ago, saying, "You know, I never say, 'The Bible says.' " He said, "Instead, if I'm quoting Mark, I'll say, 'Mark, a young man who was a friend of Peter, said this. John, one of Jesus' disciples, said this.' " And he said, "The reason I never say, 'The Bible said' is because of some of the other kooky things the Bible says." I'm like, "Whoa!" Now who decides what's kooky or not? But lately Andy just did a whole series whereby the theme of it (for his church there in Georgia) is - and he said, "It's time for us as Christians to unhitch our faith from the Old Testament." He's basically saying, "Just push it aside." And he goes, "Look, I believe that it's inspired." And then I'm thinking, "And?" And he said, "It's an inspired account of the history of an archaic God dealing with archaic people in an archaic culture. So basically, it just tells you what God did to prepare the way for the real thing, which is the New Testament." And then Andy also said, "The church, the New Testament church, was built on the resurrection." And I'm like, "Okay, it's hard to argue with that." But he said, "The church wasn't established on a Book. It was established on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if you start teaching from the Old Testament, people are going to reject Jesus Christ. All they need to know is the resurrection. You don't want them wondering, 'Why were these civilizations wiped out? Or why did they have slavery and that seemed to be approved?' " So, I get that. I understand that. The problem is - when you read the Scriptures, the church was established on a Book. You can't escape it. In fact, you want to talk about the resurrection of Jesus, when Jesus had risen from the dead and he revealed Himself to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He's walking along, talking to them. Hey, they're kicking rocks, and they're bummed because they went, "Yeah, we thought Jesus was maybe the Messiah, but now He's dead." So it says that Jesus took them through the Scriptures to show them how it was all about Him (Luke 24:27). So Jesus is actually declaring His resurrection, using all the Scriptures; not to mention the fact that Paul is the one who says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," not for just history.

"It's profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness that you will have all the tools you need to live life." What Scripture was Paul talking about? Not his own writings. Not the gospels, which most of them weren't even written at this point. He was talking about the Old Testament, and you see this throughout the Scripture. It's like you have to reject Jesus and the New Testament if you're going to reject the Old Testament. Now I understand the reasons why Andy's somewhat uncomfortable because there are things in the Old Testament that are hard to figure out, that I still sometimes wonder about. It's fun to speculate on 'em, but I don't have all the answers, and I will readily admit that because I do not believe in the inerrancy of Dave; I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. So I would rather wrestle with the passages and try to find explanations as to why God may have done what He did or said what He said in that situation. It would be easier to unhitch the Old Testament, but I'm not gonna throw away two-thirds of the Bible so that I can just give a simple gospel presentation and tell people, "Yeah, forget all that other stuff that the apostles and Jesus who said that 'not one jot or tittle of it will pass away before it's all been fulfilled' " (Matthew 5:18). If you're going to know the Scriptures, you need to know the Scriptures in their totality: Genesis through Revelation. All of it. You need to have a grip on it and a grasp. Now, is every passage.....is a genealogy somewhere as important as Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 about how the Spirit moves and how you've got to be born again and everything? No. There are some passages that we may end up using a little more than others, but we can't unhitch the part that they called the Scriptures, the part that they all taught out of - these apostles who were responsible for. Jesus, who created Christianity, and the disciples who followed Him in it, you just can't tap out on the whole Old Testament to do it. If you do that, you really don't know the Scriptures because you don't understand this stuff is important, this stuff is critical.

Well, what does it mean to know the power of God? For one thing, if you don't believe that God has power, then you obviously don't know His power. So you have to believe that God can do things supernaturally. If you don't, you're gonna be wrong, you're gonna be messed up in all sorts of other ways once you try to find natural explanations for everything, including the creation of the world and where life came from and everything else. So you certainly need to believe that God is powerful in order to build on that for any sort of a faith system at all. But not only that. Knowing the power of God is something that you also need to experience. You really don't know the power of God unless you have seen God do things in your life that you can go, "Wow!" Now, if you've never seen God do anything amazing in

your life, you're not looking closely enough because we're all surrounded by miracles of God, by things that are hard to explain in any other way. Those of you men who are married, just think about it. You're married, dude! There's no way you deserve that. There's no way that if you just were yourself, you could have suckered somebody into marrying you. (Laughing) And those of you who are like, "That's easy for you to say, I'm divorced," think about that. That's a miracle in and of itself that you escaped whatever it was that made you both so miserable that (Laughing). But when you walk out there in the morning, you see the sun coming up, do you understand how that works? I understand that beauty can be in the eye of the beholder. And you can look at a sunset and just have a perfectly scientific explanation, but can you explain why you can feel what you feel when you make that observation? What is it that makes a song be special to you, that touches your heart? There's so much in who we are that's like.....the power of God is all around. And if you reject that, and you don't know His power, ultimately what kind of.....I mean, another thing is obviously if you don't believe in the power of God, you also don't believe in the Word of God; you don't believe in the Scriptures because they came, they were God-breathed. So you throw that out. What in the world do you believe if you don't believe in His power, if you don't believe in His Word?

Now, there are consequences, and ultimately the consequence to not believing the Scriptures, not knowing the Scriptures, not knowing the power of God, is error in a lot of different ways. So how does that work? If you don't believe in the Scriptures, for one thing you will miss out on the blessings that the Scripture provides. Like I said, in 2 Timothy 3:17, where Paul says it's going to furnish you thoroughly, equip you for life. But when you look at the Scriptures, you go to the Old Testament, read Psalm 119 which is the longest chapter in the Bible. It is absolutely the most creatively amazing work of literature that you can imagine. If you, in your English Bible, see before the first eight verses it says *Aleph*, and then before the next eight it says *Beth*, and then *Gimel*, *Daleth*, *Heth*, through the Hebrew alphabet. But understand this - in the Hebrew, those eight verses that come after "A", *Aleph*, each verse starts with the letter "A," the letter *Aleph*. Then the next eight verses all start with *Beth*, and the next eight all start with *Gimel*. And yet it makes sense. Try writing something like that yourself. It's crazy. But the whole thing is, Psalm 119 is all about the Word of God, and He uses different words for the Bible (so I'm just saying the Bible); but He talks about the Scriptures, the judgments of the LORD, His testimonies, His Law. But it's all these different things saying, "Here are the benefits." So, for instance (Psalm 119:9), "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."

So, it may be, if the Bible's telling the truth (and I know that it is) that, if you meditate in God's Word, you will see it clean up your act. It'll help you to avoid some of the things that are corrupting you. But he also says in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" - a promise of direction that comes from the Word of God. So again, if you don't live in the Scriptures, that doesn't work for you. In Psalm 1:1, you have the most ridiculous promise of all, where it says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." And then it says, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." You ever think about that? That here's the psalmist saying, "If you meditate on the Word of God, everything that you do will prosper." Now that makes me think I want to spend more time in the Word. Right? But if you don't do that, then those benefits aren't yours at all.

But also, ultimately, if you don't really know the Scriptures, then you've given up every basis for being able to know anything objectively. You now have no standard for epistemology. You have no way of discerning whether something's true or not, other than your own feeling about it. And I'll tell you something. When I was 2 years old, I taught myself to read, and I started reading the Bible because we didn't have a TV, and I've been reading the Bible ever since. So 63 years I've been reading this Book. And you know what? Reading the things that I agree with has never helped me. Reading the things that tell me I'm wrong - that's powerful. And I'm really not helped - I mean, that's not completely true because sometimes we're encouraged by going, "Oh, good, I'm on the right track" - but if you have a Bible that doesn't have authority over you, then you might as well name your religion after yourself. Don't pretend like you're following God. And so, giving up on Scriptures causes you to lose all the benefits of Scripture, and then it leaves you completely out in the dark in terms of any kind of concept of what's true or not.

Neglecting the power of God does several things to you as well. If you become like the Sadducees where you're like, "Ehh, I don't really believe in miracles, I'm pretty skeptical," well, for one thing, if you don't believe in the power of God, or you look at your life and go, "I haven't seen God's power doing anything at all," how do you say, "Thank you"? Thank you for what? There are people today - there's a lot of research now on gratitude, and they're realizing that people who are grateful are healthier physically, healthier emotionally. And so it's really funny because people

who don't believe in the power of God, they don't even believe in a God, they're going, "Oh, we need to be thankful because it's healthier for you," and they're trying to figure out. But who do we thank? Each other? They think that Thanksgiving is when we thank the Indians for giving us corn or whatever. And now there're a lot of people who are just thankful to the universe in general. I haven't figured out how to be thankful to no one. But if I don't believe in God's power, I cannot look back at my life and say, "Wow! That was pretty cool that that happened the way that it did when it did. Thank You, God." And that's a huge loss. That damages you to not be.....and the alternative is that you become bitter about everything that's happened because everything's just dumb luck, it's just an accident; or you blame people, you look back at your past, and you're like, "That was their fault," and you can't see the hand of God in anything instead of being.....and basically, you can either be a thankful person or a bitter person; you can't do both at once. Believing in the power of God opens the door for thanksgiving instead of bitterness.

But also, how do you face the future if you don't believe in the power of God? There's no reason to pray because God's not gonna do anything. There's no reason to be optimistic or hopeful because what happens is gonna happen, and it doesn't really matter. You become ultimately.....existentialism is a philosophy of despair, where it is what it is, and I'm just flowin' with it until I die. What a miserable way to live, to not have any kind of hope that a miracle might happen. Now, the alternative to hope would be just fear or anxiety. And I think it was Timothy Keller who said, "If you're bitter, it's like saying, 'I think God got it wrong.'" And he said, "If you're worried or fearful, it's like saying, 'I'm afraid that God's gonna get it wrong.'" See, if you let go of a powerful God, now all you do is have the past is terrible, the future is terrible, and then, without the power of God, you don't have a Bible, and now we've come full circle in all of this.

I know you all have Bibles, I'm sure. You probably have.....I mean, I have tons of versions of the Bible even on my phone and my iPad and my computer and all over my shelf. My little granddaughter sometimes just looks at my shelf in my study at home and goes, "Why do you have all those Bibles?" because I have quite a few; and some of them are my mom's, my grandma's, my dad's, and they're all dead, so I keep them there, and I don't have a great explanation for it. But she's like, "Doesn't somebody else need the Bibles?" And I go, "Well, we give lots of Bibles to people. It's okay." But having a Bible and really knowing it as the Holy Scriptures, making it an integral part of your life, is such a privilege. But so often we get busy with

other stuff. And so what is it that we spend more time on than Bible study, than meditating on the Scriptures, digging a little deeper? It's not just rushing through it. Meditating on God's Word means that every word has significance. And there are parts of the Scriptures that.....I mean, hardly a day would ever go by when I don't go through Psalm 23. It's one of my favorite passages of Scripture. Isaiah 53 is probably my favorite. But the 23rd Psalm is, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." But when I go through it, I just stop and emphasize one particular word. For instance, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." And then one day, I'll just be, "The LORD is my shepherd." He's the only one. And then, "The LORD." He is the Boss. He's the Master. He's in charge. "The LORD is." Sometimes I don't feel like He is, but He really is. "The LORD is my shepherd." It's personal. "I shall not want." I won't! I refuse to live chasing after stuff. I refuse to say, "I'm not happy here, I want this to be different, I want this person to be different because I've decided." No. "I shall not." I choose to not want and so on. And I go through the whole Scripture, and I do that with a lot of Scriptures. I do it with the Lord's prayer. When I pray that, it's like, "Our Father who art in heaven." He's our Father, which tells me it personalizes it, but it also makes it corporate because He's all of our Fathers. And He's a Father; not just a God, not just a Judge. There are so many metaphors God could have used, and yet Jesus' favorite metaphor for God is "the Father." And so you think about that for a while. But that makes the Scriptures so rich and so powerful when we do it. But we just have to decide to do it. Don't fall into a habit of "a chapter a day keeps the devil away." (Laughing) Slow down and understand. This is all breathed by God. This is Scripture. Every bit of it is holy.

And if we understand that, and then we realize God is powerful, if I know His Scriptures, and I know His power, it keeps me on track. Not that I'm never wrong, but, man, when you slack off on the Bible, and then you start slacking off on believing in His power or even observing, going, "Wow! That was cool that God did that." I think for a lot of Christians the biggest miracle they ever see is gettin' a parking place up close at Walmart. "Oh, praise God!" (Laughing) But if we looked at a group this size (tonight), you might look at your life and go, "I haven't had a miracle happen to me this week yet. It's already Wednesday night. I was kinda comin' here hopin' there would be a miracle, and then Jack's not even here and....." (Laughing) Okay. But how many of you have seen something happen in your life this week that you just go, "Wow!?" Raise your hand. Look at that! And I'm going to say because I don't have my hand up, that somehow God didn't do anything? God isn't just my personal God; He's our Father. And, as a result, if you just spend a

little time and hear some people's stories, you go, "God's doin' amazing stuff! He really is." I love His power. I don't just love what His power does for me, I love what it does for us. I love hearing stories of people who see God working in their life. I love having people who discover some truth in the Scripture for the first time, and they'll go, "You know, I was just reading this passage, and it kind of hit me that this might be the case." And I'm like that's so cool that they came up with it themselves. And for me, that personally makes up for the twenty people who will email me with questions that if they had just Googled it, they could have found the answer (or used a concordance). But, man, when you go, "It's the Scriptures, and I get to read it," don't be afraid of, "Well, I might get the wrong idea." I've studied it, I've been to seminary and everything. I get the wrong idea about it all the time. But the Word of God is alive and powerful. See, power is in His Word, and His power is working in our lives all the time. And the wise thing for us to do is to open our eyes to His Word and to open our eyes to His power; and realize that we are surrounded by miracles. The group of people who love Jesus, who know Him, who have been saved by Him, we should be the most optimistic and cheerful and excited people because we carry around - in our Bible, in our hand, in our phone, in our iPad - the living Word of God! It's what He says, and it's alive, so it tailors itself to whatever it is that we're going through at the time. And I'm not a big Bible bingo person. You know, some people are just like, "Okay, I need an answer," and they just flop their Bible open and pick out a verse. And I've heard people criticize that, going, "Yeah, you're taking that verse out of context." But if you're using the Word of God, it's always in the context of the Word of God. You might be wrong about some stuff, but if you look at even how Jesus and Paul and Peter quoted the Old Testament, sometimes they yanked something kind of out of context and used the Word. Because they knew it so well, it just came out. That's the fruit of the life that, with the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives and with the Word of God being a focus for our lives, man, we're so blessed. We're so.....I know it's not a Christian word, but we're lucky to have what we have. And it's all keeping us on track and rescuing us from the error that comes when you play down the Word of God or ignore it and whether you just lose all ability to see His power.

Now, if you're here tonight, and maybe you've never even submitted your life to Him, the most powerful thing that God wants to do for you tonight is to forgive your sins. Nobody else really wants to forgive you that much. Even that accident forgiveness that they advertise on the insurance companies, (Laughing) in the small print, it says they don't have that in California. So, nobody really wants to forgive you except God. Jesus died for you. Probably not many people have done that.

And He wants to forgive you for free. He doesn't want anything from you. It's just you have an opportunity to say, "Wow, I want to be connected to Him." And if you do that tonight - and after the service, there'll be guys down here who would love to pray with you and introduce you to Jesus. Or chances are the people sitting near you would love to pray with you as well. If you're just like, "Man, I could use some prayer," tell the person next to you. If they get a really uncomfortable look, get them and take them to somebody else because you both need prayer. (Laughing) But it's a free gift. It's real. It's powerful. Your life can start over now. And I hope that you'll do it. And you will find His Word coming alive, you'll see His power working in your life right away. And for the rest of us, let's just not slack off. Let's be in His Word and looking and expecting and asking for His power and see what He wants to do in our lives.

Let's pray.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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