

Good Friday
John 18:1-19:42

What is meditation?

That's not as easy a question as it seems. There's a lot of different types of meditation and lots of ways to go about it. I'd like to keep it simple. I think the simplest way to think about meditation, a meditation on meditation, if you will, is that meditation is simply what you engage your focus and mind on. And like a cow chewing cud, which the Hebrew word for meditation brings to mind, meditation usually involves a repeated engagement of your focus and mind. Here's some examples:

It's someone thinking deeply about the Bible passage they just read.

It's someone researching what the Bible says about a particular question like how is the word 'righteousness' used in the Old Testament and New Testament?

It's someone totally engaged with a sermon or ted talk or podcast.

It's someone totally engaged with a book or subject of study.

It's someone totally engaged with the workout they're doing.

It's a teenager totally engaged in their latest musical obsession. Often, this is sinful.

It's someone totally engaged with their latest romantic obsession. This too, oftentimes is sinful.

It's someone looking at porn. Which is obviously a sin.

It's someone worrying. About anything. And yes, worry is a sin.

What we meditate on matters. In a lot of ways, it shapes who we are.

It doesn't create our reality as some false Christians like to assert, but it cannot be denied that what we meditate on does affect who we are. And even many times, it affects where we are in life. Consider the analogy of doctors of medicine. You might consider med school as one big multi-year deep meditation session. How well they meditate often determines how successful they are. Of course, natural talent plays a big role, but usually only talented people go to med school. What sets them apart from each other most of the time is how well they focus their attention and mind in med school. So we definitely should be careful about what we meditate upon.

What does God want us to meditate upon?

Let's start off with something God does not want you to meditate upon. And that is the details of your sin. You know about the young man in the Corinth congregation that is sleeping with his step-mom. Paul merely states what he has done and that not even pagans accept this kind of immorality. He doesn't dwell on the young man's sin. He merely instructs the Corinthian Christians to shun the young man so that he will face the consequences of his actions and God-willing, repent. St. Paul knows the total wickedness of our old man. He knows that if we dwell on, or meditate, upon the details of our sin or the sin of others, our old Adam will use it as an opportunity for more sin.

Martin Chemnitz also understood this problem. He wrote a book about the two natures in Christ. In his time, it was customary to include a dedicatory epistle to a sponsor. This sponsor would support you financially and politically and maybe even pay for the printing, so it was prudent to dedicate your work to them. In the dedicatory epistle of the *Two Natures In Christ*, Martin Chemnitz makes this great statement: "The knowledge of ourselves puts only sorrows and miseries before us, but the knowledge of Christ, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption' [1 Cor 1:30], is truly "the knowledge of salvation' as Zacharias says [Luke 1:77]." Martin Chemnitz is a man who knows his sin but does not meditate upon it and meditates upon Jesus more.

Martin Chemnitz is a man who knows how wicked we are.

Unbelievers who promote an Eastern kind of meditation always urge you to seek wisdom from inside yourself. St. Paul and Martin Chemnitz know that nothing good dwells inside of you. That is, nothing good dwells inside your old Adam. Sure, even Paul admits that the law is written on the heart of the old Adam, but it is so obscured by original sin that you cannot tell up from down, nor right from left, nor how desperately wicked you are in your old man. To meditate upon sin is to invite your old man to sin even more. So God doesn't want us to dwell on the details of anyone's sin, including our own.

God wants us to meditate upon His Word. As Psalm 19 says:

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb. (Ps 19:7-10)

If you want a good meditation to embark upon, look at Psalms 1, 19, and 119 and do a study on all the different words God uses for His Word. You have five alone in the verses I just cited: law, testimony, precepts, commandment and rules. And what promise does God give? His Word will 1) revive your soul, 2) make you wise, 3) make you rejoice, 4) enlighten your eyes, and 5) teach you righteousness.

The Word of God contains both Law and Gospel. The Law condemns your sin. And you must not shy away from this use of the Law no matter how painful it is. This is not a meditation on your sin, but on how you have fallen short of the perfect Law of God. And the Holy Spirit reveals to you how desperately wicked you are in your old man and how helpless your situation is apart from Christ. This must be revealed through God's Law. And since we are stuck with the old Adam until we die, we must continue to examine ourselves in the harsh light of God's Law. On this side of glory, the Law will always accuse you of your sin, but that's not all the Law does.

You are born again through water and the Spirit. You have the Holy Spirit of God who promises to work in you through the Word of God, both Law and Gospel. He fulfills His promise to you in studying God's Word.

He revives your soul. That is, He gives you a new man who delights in the Law of God.

He makes you wise. That is, He teaches you God's wisdom so you know how to apply the knowledge of God in your day to day life so that God is glorified and your neighbor is served in love.

He makes you rejoice. That is, He makes you confident in the promises of God so that you can rejoice in Christ no matter the circumstances in your life.

He enlightens your eyes. That is, He fills your eyes with light so you continue to look to the true light of Christ.

And He teaches you righteousness. That is, He teaches you the righteousness of God so that you know what God's righteousness looks like. And you won't be fooled by the world's so-called righteousness.

The Word of God also contains the Gospel which is nothing else than the promises of God and the actions of God on your behalf. The promises of God apply to you because you are His dear child in baptism. He chose you before the foundation of the world!

He didn't choose you because of your lineage or your works or your will. He chooses you because of His good and gracious will. And because He chooses you, you can depend on the promises of God. If you chose God, as if you could, you would be filled with uncertainty whether God's promises applied to you or not. Jesus knows what inside of you and His Holy Spirit reveals to you what lies inside of you. The only certainty you have with this knowledge is death. Eternal death. But you didn't choose God. He chose you! One way to understand the Bible is nothing else than God repeatedly keeping His promises. If God kept His promise to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Elijah, and all the other sinners in the Bible, He will certainly keep His promise for you. And His promise for you is eternal salvation!

So meditate upon God's Word. When we think of the Word of God not returning void like we hear about in Isaiah (55:11), we usually think of other people. But God's Word will not return void for you, dear child of God.

We are also to meditate upon the Passion of our Lord. Especially during lent and Holy Week, but most especially on Good Friday.

A promise is a guarantee. And every guarantee must have a guarantor.

You certainly know how loans work. The lending institution or person gives you money and you guarantee to pay it back. Whoever lends takes on the role of guarantor if you fail to pay back the money. But you set yourself up as a guarantor when you borrow money. Have you ever been turned down for a loan? The lending institution basically says that you aren't a good guarantor. And they may be right. People fail all the time to pay back what they owe. We are sinners which means we're fallible. We may take a loan we know we can't pay back. Looking beyond lending money, have you ever failed someone? Have you ever made a promise and failed to keep that promise? Has anyone failed you? We live in a sin-filled world with other sinners. You will fail others and other people will fail you. But God never fails.

Jesus dying on the cross is proof that God keeps His Word. He will not fail you. All His promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

If you want proof that God loves you, look to the cross. Jesus died for you. I'm convinced that your name was in His mind during His passion. He died for all of mankind which includes you. But He died for you personally! So meditate on the cross of Jesus.

We don't meditate on the cross to feel sorry for Jesus.

You meditate on the cross to see the ugliness of your sin. Your sin is what led Jesus to become Man and die on a cross. Your sin didn't make Jesus die on the cross. He did that willingly. As Jesus said to Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above." (Jn 19:11) No one has the authority to kill the author of life. Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified. How do you redeem sinners? By making a blood atonement for them. But not just any blood atonement. Blood atonement by God Himself. See what kind of love God has for you? He made blood atonement for you so that you can be called a child of God. And you are!

To meditate on the cross is also to meditate on the love God has for you! No matter how dark your sin is, it is covered by the blood of Jesus. Jesus loved you when you were unlovable. He did this by dying on a cross. And His dying on the cross is the guarantor that the guarantee of your eternal life in Him is secure. And His love for you is even greater than this. He gives you His Holy Spirit in your Baptism so that you know that you are chosen by God. He gives you His Absolution so that you know your forgiveness continues. And He gives you Himself in His Supper so that you know He is with you in the midst of this tear-stained life. He will not abandon you nor forsake you.

Meditate on the cross of Christ and you know that God always keeps His promises. And His promise to you is the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

To God be the glory. Amen.