

Delighting in God's Word: Drawn from Thomas Watson's *The Christian on the Mount*¹

Dr Jim Davison²

ABSTRACT

The work chosen for this article is Thomas Watson's, *The Christian on the Mount*, for it encourages all believers to explore the neglected art and discipline of meditation on the Scriptures. From a focus upon delighting upon God's word, Watson suggests that the believer's affections will be drawn not only to embrace that word but a desire will be created in the heart to meditate upon it day and night; just as the psalmist did in Psalm 1. He explains that meditation goes beyond simply study of the Word, which brings understanding. Meditation is presented as a duty which should not be slighted. It should be deliberate, morning and evening and at the same time impromptu. The benefits and usefulness of meditation are explained and the necessity of meditation cannot be downplayed.

KEY WORDS: Transforming grace, the Word of God, study, the art of meditation, royal edit.

Psalm 1 has been described as “the Psalm of Psalms.” This is a fair comment as it has within it the very essence of Christianity. It may also be described as ‘A Travel Guide’ that requires close attention as it maps out the road of “quicksand where the wicked sink down into perdition” and the firm road on which “the saints tread to glory.” In his Sunday evening reflection on Psalm 1 (22/03/20) Steve Auld (Pastor, Great Victoria Street Baptist Church, Belfast) reminded us of this and on Wednesday evening (1/4/20) he drew our attention to the need to take care, to keep a watchfulness over our souls. As a help to taking care he painted a picture of life as a garden and emphasised the need to pay great attention to the garden to ensure it is not overtaken by weeds or other hindrances

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Christian on the Mount*, p.1 (Orlando, Florida: The Northampton Press, 2009).

² Dr. James Davison, B.Th, M.Phil, PhD (QUB). jimmy.davison@ntlworld.com.

to its beauty and usefulness and so be destroyed. The same applies to the Christian life; such attention is needed that will enable the Believer to grow and flourish in the service of God.³

The same point regarding watchfulness is made by Thomas Watson when he says, “Watch over your hearts every day; lock up your hearts every morning and give Him the key.”⁴ He quotes Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153) who would often say, “Lord, there is nothing more flitting than my heart. Keep watch and ward there.”⁵ Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686) was, and still is, a highly acclaimed Puritan minister. He earned an M.A. from Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He served as pastor of St. Stephen’s Walbrook, London for about ten years until he was ejected at a result of the Act of Uniformity in 1662. But Watson continued to preach in private homes and other places, until the Declaration of Indulgence came into force in 1672. From this date Watson obtained a license to preach and this he did at Crosby Hall, Bishopsgate. When Watson stepped down from his charge at Crosby Hall, he retired to Barnston in Essex, where he died suddenly while praying. Watson’s works, which are still very much in demand today, express a depth of doctrinal teaching in a very concise heart-warming and heart-searching way. There is also much practical wisdom demonstrated in the application and this many times by way of illustration. In this chosen work, *The Christian on the Mount*, Watson invites all believers to explore the much passed-over and neglected hidden gem and discipline of meditation on the Scriptures. The comments above are but echoes of God’s Word: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). Knowing that the springs of life can become polluted (Prov. 21:2; Matt. 15: 28-29) it is important to take this advice seriously.

Following some exegetical comments on Psalm 1 Watson turns to the subject of delighting in God’s Word. He first makes the point that God has equipped mankind with the capacity to delight: “The great God has grafted the affection of delight into every creature; it has by the instinct of nature something to delight itself in.” But it is important to note that while this is true, the Christian does not make God’s Word his delight by perception or feeling; it is by God Himself

³ *The Christian on the Mount*, p.1

⁴ *Ibid*, p.119

⁵ Cited in Watson, p.118

enlightening the soul. It is “not by intuition but by divine inspiration.”⁶ This God does when He infuses transforming grace into the soul.

Watson makes this clear when he says that “the saint’s delight in the law of God proceeds...from soundness of judgement.” And with this soundness of judgement, wrought by the Spirit of God in the inner man “the mind apprehends a beauty in God’s law and then the judgement draws the affections...after it.” Delight also shines forth when there is in the soul, “a predominance of grace,” for it gives a new emphasis to the will, which is evidenced by a “spontaneity and cheerfulness in God’s service.”⁷

However, while it is acknowledged that all have the capacity to express delight, it is also true that, by nature, none have the desire to delight in or serve God. In Job 21: 14-15 we read that the wicked say to God, “Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of your ways” and “What is the Almighty that we should serve him?” And the psalmist says, “The fool says in his heart ‘there is no God’” (Psalm 14:1; see Rom. 3:10-18).

But by the working of grace in the heart, as noted above, a new emphasis is placed in the will. For Paul this is nothing less than becoming “a new creation” in Christ (2 Cor.5:17). The effect of this work of grace in the heart, “files off the rebellion of the will...it changes the lion-like fierceness into a dove-like sweetness; it changes hatred into delight.” Indeed, we can go further and say that “a gracious heart loves everything that has the stamp of God upon it.”⁸

Now if a heart that has the stamp of God’s approval upon it loves everything that has the stamp of God upon it, surely there must be delight in God’s revelation of Himself. In other words, would not God’s revelation of Himself in His Word be a most engaging subject to give attention to by a gracious soul? And in doing so would not the thoughts and actions, of a gracious soul, be constantly entwined with it? Surely the answer to these questions is an emphatic yes! the mind will be “wholly busied about it.” Furthermore, the delight that would flow from this activity will result in the child of God giving God “the

⁶ Watson, *The Christian on the Mount*, pp.4, 5

⁷ *Ibid*, pp.5, 6

⁸ *Ibid*, pp.6, 7

strength of his affections, the cream of his duties; if he has anything better than another, God shall have it.”⁹

Watson also describes the Word of God as a “divine treasury to enrich us;” to enrich us in the knowledge of the truth pertaining to assurance and the mystery of God (Col.2:2); and as a “strong cordial” that will give “strong consolations” that can “sweeten afflictions.” But for these truths to be of any benefit, the cordial must be taken, and the treasury opened for knowledge and truth to be received. Understanding these truths and applying them will surely bring comfort, and O how we need such assurance and comfort at this present time (Ps. 119:50; 1 Cor. 15:55)!¹⁰

The psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). This is a lovely clear description of God’s Word and its purpose, but if we do not look to where the light or lamp is shining, how can we know where we are going? Likewise, when the Word is described by Peter as “a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:20). The darkness speaks of a heart without Christ, a failure to take heed to the prophetic word, while the morning star is none other than Christ in the heart, the one of whom the prophets spoke.

Many other reasons could be given why we should delight in God’s Word but the all-encompassing one is because it reveals the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “The law of God” says Watson, “is a letter sent from heaven, indited by the Holy Ghost and sealed with the blood of Christ.” What an amazing description of God’s Word! In support of his argument Watson quotes Isaiah 62:5 and Hosea 2:19 and asks the question, “Is it not delightful reading over this love letter?” The response, surely, is Yes! Exercising our minds and hearts with such an all-encompassing description of God’s Word would give satisfaction and delight to any soul!¹¹

Another help to attaining this delight in God’s Word is to have a “spiritual heart;” one that is not earthly minded, for “an earthly heart will not delight in

⁹ Ibid, pp.11, 12

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.16, 17

¹¹ Ibid, p.15

spiritual mysteries.” Pray, therefore, for a spiritual heart; one that will thirst after the living God.¹²

All this evidence, for Watson, indicates that to engage the mind in God’s Word brings delight, and “he who delights in God does not complain that he has too much of God, but rather too little.” Now to attain this delight, we must hold God’s Word in high esteem; prize it so highly that it is “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Ps. 19:10). But the casual reading of God’s Word will not achieve this desire. It will only be accomplished by setting such a high valuation on God’s Word that the affections will be drawn to embrace it and a desire arise in the heart to meditate upon it day and night; just as the psalmist did.¹³

As the psalmist expressed it: “As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2a). This was no quiet longing after some water, but the audible panting produced by the intense desire and overwhelming sense of want. The implication we can draw from this agonising desire after God, by the psalmist, is that he believes it is God alone who can satisfy the thirsting soul (see also Ps. 36:8-9; Ps. 63:1; Isa. 12:2-3; John 6:69).

However, as intimated above, to experience these realities requires an intimacy with God’s Word and the best way to have this intimacy is not just to read God’s Word, not just to study God’s Word to gain knowledge, but to mediate upon it so as to put its precepts into practice.

It is interesting to note Watson’s reasons why he sees the study of God’s Word as different from meditating on it and why he urges meditation. His explanation is insightful: “They differ in their nature...they differ in their design...and they differ in the outcome and result.” In their nature because “Study is the work of the brain, meditation of the heart; study sets the mind to work; meditation sets the heart to work.” In their design because “the design of study is notion; the design of meditation is piety. The design of study is finding out a truth; the design of meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth. The one searches

¹² Ibid, p.21

¹³ Ibid, p.20

for the vein of gold, the other digs out the gold.” In regard to outcome and result, “Study leaves a man never the whit the better; it is like the winter sun that has no warmth or influence. Meditation leaves one in a holy frame; it meets the heart when frozen and makes it drop into tears of love.”¹⁴

In the Psalms we find the same sentiments being expressed by the psalmists regarding the blessings and delight that flows from meditating on God’s Word: “Blessed is the man who[se]...delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2); “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word” (Psalm 119:15-16); “Your servant will meditate on your statutes. Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counsellors” (Psalm 119:23b-24); “O how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day...it is ever with me” (Psalm 119:97-98b).

While these testimonies regarding meditation are true, and a great encouragement to all God’s people to be often occupied in the art of meditation, the all-important reason for doing so is because God commands it. In Joshua 1:1-9 we read how Joshua was charged by God, to lead the Israelites into the promised land. But within this charge we find the injunction to mediate on God’s Word: “The LORD said to Joshua....This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written therein” (vv.1, 8).

Now although the charge is specifically given to Joshua it places each child of God under the same authority and security. In Deut. 32:46 we read “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law.” And in 1 Kings we read, “Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and his commandments...as it is written in the Law of Moses” (1 Kings 2:1-4). We read in the New Testament that the mother of Jesus “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Finally, on the road to Emmaus the hearts of the two companions were on fire as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them (Luke 24:32). And this before He was revealed to them!

¹⁴ Ibid, p.31

The Joshua periscope, quoted above, is fundamental in God's revelation of Himself, for up to this time instructions regarding obeying God were given by direct verbal communication (Genesis 2:16; 26:5; Exodus 3:10). But here we read of the "Book of the Law", which was written by Moses at the command of God (Exodus 17:14). We take the "Book of the Law," up to this point, to be the first five books of Holy Scripture (the Pentateuch), to which was added the Book of Joshua (Joshua 24:26) and the following books of the Old and New Testament ("Holy Scripture") in later generations until it was closed by the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos.

Having shown the delight to be had from God's Word and the duty imposed upon all Believers to meditate on it, we turn, briefly, to enquire into the nature of meditation. Watson's definition of meditation is helpful in our quest to determine its nature: He writes: "[It is] the soul's retiring of itself so that, by a serious and solemn thinking upon God, the heart may be raised up to heavenly affections." This description reveals three things about the nature of meditation: 1) "the soul's retiring of itself" indicates the need to "get out of the crowd of worldly business...take heed the world does not follow you...Lock and bolt the door against the world;" 2) "a serious and solemn thinking upon God" indicates "it is not a cursory work," it has an "intensity to recollect and gather together the thoughts" and "a staying of the thoughts on the object;" and 3) "there is the raising of the heart to holy affections," which is nothing less than to "heal the soul of its deadness."¹⁵

What we have considered so far has enabled us to recognise that meditation on God's Word is a most essential tool in developing a life of godliness; a life in all its aspects that will honour and praise God. God has given us His Word that we might understand His "wisdom in writing, and His love in sending it to us." But to emphasise it once more, "we must not run over it in haste," for if we do "the truths of God will not stay with us." The reason for this is because "The heart is hard and the memory slippery." So hard and slippery that reading God's Word without meditation would be like "writing in the sand or like pouring water into a sieve."¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, pp.25, 26, 27

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.65, 66

Watson, in seeking to drive home the necessity of meditation, quotes Deut. 6:6 “These words which I command you this day shall be in your heart” and insists that “without meditation the truths that we know will never affect our hearts.” Two illustrations are given to help our understanding of the point being made: 1) “As a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart”; and 2) as eating requires the stomach to digest the food for it to be of value, “Just so it is not the taking in a truth at the ear, but the meditating on it, that is the digestion of it in the mind that makes it nourishment.”¹⁷

A final reason in support of Watson’s argument is that “without meditation we make ourselves guilty of slighting God and His Word.” This is a most serious charge, but if we accept, as we must surely do, that the purpose of God in giving us His Word was that we should “meditate on it day and night so to that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it” (Joshua 1:8) it is a just charge. The words of God to Joshua are nothing less than a “royal edit” as they come from the King of kings and Lord of lords. Failure to meditate on God’s Word, is not only to “undervalue it”, it is truly a “slighting [of God’s] authority, and contempt done to the divine majesty.”¹⁸

Following his reasons for meditation two negative points are considered by Watson to show “why there are so few godly Christians”. The negative points are: 1) “People are so much in the shop that they are seldom on the mount with God.” In other words, Christians are more busied about worldly business than about soul business, so much so that meditation “is grown almost out of fashion.” Indeed, says Watson, “It is to be wailed in our times that so many who go under the name of professing believers have banished godly discourse from their tables and meditation from their closets”; and 2) “The devil is an enemy of meditation”, he is opposed to it because it is “a means to compose the heart and bring it into a gracious frame.” For the devil hearing God’s Word preached is one thing, but meditation is quite another: “He can stand your small shot, provided you do not put in this bullet [of meditation].”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid, p.66

¹⁸ Ibid, pp.66, 67

¹⁹ Ibid, p.68

Turning to the reproofs, illustrated by general examples, it is to be noted that they cover the world of farming, medicine, the legal profession, and general traders. Surely only as examples! In each category there are those who meditate but they “turn all their meditations the wrong way,” they “let out their meditations upon other fruitless things.” Things that have no benefit to their souls. Like the farmer who “meditates on his acres of land [and] not upon his soul” or who will “not let his ground lie fallow, but he lets his heart lie fallow.” Likewise, the physician “who meditates on his remedies, but seldom on those remedies that the gospel prescribes for salvation: faith and repentance.” Or the lawyer who focuses on the laws pertaining to his profession (the common law) to such an extent that on “God’s law he seldom meditates in it either day or night.”²⁰

So also, the tradesman, who is “encumbered about with many things” that are lawful, but he does so to the extent that he meditates on his “account book day and night.” He does not meditate “on God’s book” and this, for Watson, can only be “fruitless meditation” with the result that you have “gotten but a fool’s purchase when you die (Luke 12:20).”²¹

Having reproved those who neglect the duty of meditation Watson, eager to impress upon his readers, once again, the necessity of meditation, writes, “If ever there were a duty, I would press upon you with more earnestness and zeal it would be this, because so much vital parts and spirit of religion lie in it.” Such is his desire to extol meditation as an aid to a closer communion with God he gives this very apt illustration: “Food may as well nourish without digesting, as we can fructify in holiness without meditation.” Watson goes on to liken meditation to a hill, which “when you have gotten to the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect: Christ and heaven before you.”²²

Watson now turns to consider two objections to meditation: 1) “So much business in the world...leaves no time for meditation”; and 2) “Getting the heart into a meditating frame is very difficult.” To the first of these objections Watson notes that “the world indeed is an enemy to meditation...and in a crowd of

²⁰ Ibid, p.69

²¹ Ibid, pp.69, 70

²² Ibid, p.71

worldly employments, it is easy to lose all thoughts of God.” But to ensure this does not happen we are advised not to treat piety as a “minor matter, a thing fit only for idle hours.” Now all this is not to decry the legitimacy of worldly business, rather, it is to highlight a legitimate concern that people who raise such objections, down-play “the great business of piety.” It was never God’s intention that the affairs of the world or “a particular vocation should jostle out the general duty to holiness.”²³

The second objection considered by Watson, namely, “Getting the heart into a meditating frame is very difficult.” In this objection it can be seen that “the flesh cries out for ease. . . . It is reluctant to pray, to repent; it is reluctant to put its neck under Christ’s yoke.” But as is noted in Matthew 11:12, which Watson refers to, there is a holy violence to be exercised in our relation to the kingdom of heaven. In other words, “as our salvation cost Christ His blood; it may well cost us sweat.” It is also pointed out by Watson that “riches are hard to come by” but this does not deter men from venturing for such riches. They do not conclude that because it is a difficult task they will “sit still and be without them.” “Men venture for gold” but there is a reluctance for many Believers “to spend and be spent for that which is more precious than the gold of Ophir.”²⁴

Watson accepts that on “first entering upon meditation, it may seem hard, yet once we are entered it is sweet and pleasant.” So sweet and pleasant that “we shall sometimes think ourselves even in heaven” and declare with Peter, “Lord, it is good that we are here” (Matt. 17:4). Such an experience can have only one outcome, the “Christian who meets with God in the mount would not exchange his hours of meditation for the most orient pearls or sparkling beauties that the world can afford.”²⁵

Having removed the two objections Watson goes on, helpfully, to explain the difference between “occasional meditation” and “deliberate meditation”. Of the first he says, “[they] are such as are taken up on any sudden occasion.” In seeking to illustrate what he means Watson suggests that when we “look up to the heavens and see them richly embroidered with light” we could meditate on

²³ Ibid, pp.73, 74

²⁴ Ibid. pp.74, 75

²⁵ Ibid, p.

this: “If the footstool is so glorious, what is the throne where God sits!” Likewise, when we see “the skies bespangled with stars,” it would be an occasion to think, “What is Christ, the Bright Morning Star!” Meditating on such subjects would surely warm our hearts; they would be like “music that delights the senses” and acts as a “good conscience.” Watson’s description of a good conscience is lovely: “[it is] the bird of paradise within, whose chirping melody enchants and ravishes the soul with joy.”²⁶

Everyday things like, when dressing in the morning or retiring at night or having a meal or walking in the garden are some of the things Watson suggests could lead to impromptu meditations. For example, “when dressing yourselves in the morning” pose this question to yourself: “I have put on my clothes, but have I put on Christ?” And as for mealtimes, use them to consider “How blessed are those who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” Oh, what “a royal feast that will be”; even “a love feast.” With these suggestions and others like them it is easy to understand the benefit Watson aims at by having “heavenly meditations from earthly occurrences.” Indeed, says Watson, “it argues a spiritual heart can turn everything to a spiritual use.” And in doing so the blessing of God would surely be upon such meditation.²⁷

In regard to deliberate meditation Watson makes only one point, but in making it he is very clear and precise: “set some time apart every day so that you may in a serious and solemn manner converse with God in the mount.” Following on from this Watson considers the most suitable time and duration for such meditation. As for a suitable time Watson accepts that “it is rather hard to prescribe because of men’s various calling and employments.” However, he indicates his preference for the morning in saying “the morning is the most fitting time.” Watson’s first reason for his preference, is on the premise that the first fruits are to be offered to God (Exodus 23:19) and this means that “God [should] have the first fruits of the day; the first of our thoughts must be reserved for heaven.”²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, p.77.

²⁷ Ibid, pp.78, 79

²⁸ Ibid, pp.79, 80

Expanding on his argument Watson gives five additional reasons why the morning; “the golden hour” and “the queen of the day”, as he calls it, is best. Because: 1) the “mind is most fit for holy duties”; 2) “morning thoughts stay longest with us the whole day afterwards”; 3) “Perfume your mind with heavenly thoughts in the morning and it will not lose its spiritual fragrance”; 4) “Wind up your hearts towards heaven in the beginning of the day and it will go better all the day afterwards”; and 5) “He who loses his heart in the morning in the world will hardly find it again all the day after.”²⁹

There is no denying that the reasons proffered by Watson give wise council, but we must also note that he does not rule out performing this duty in the evening. He accepts that “God had His evening sacrifice as well as His morning one,” but it clear, to Watson, that evening meditation should only apply when “the urgency of business [allows] time only for reading and prayer in the morning.” On these occasions it will be good to “recompense the lack of morning meditation with evening meditation.” It is also true that “you [may] find yourself more inclined to good thoughts in the evening.” This being so we “dare not neglect meditation at such a time.” Indeed, to do so “may be a quenching of the Spirit” and you must never “drive this blessed dove from the ark of your soul.”³⁰

Before leaving the topic of deliberate meditation Watson highlights, again, his preference for this duty to be exercised in the morning by another lovely illustration: “as the flower of the sun opens in the morning to take in the sweet beams of the sun; so open your soul in the morning to take in the sweet thoughts of God.”³¹ But whether morning or evening one thing is fundamental to Watson and that is the necessary duty of daily deliberate meditation.

Turning to the question of how long such meditation should last Watson suggests “one half-hour every day.” However, it would appear that there is a flexibility in his suggestion with this comment: “Meditate so long until you find your heart grow warm in this duty.” To explain what he means Watson gives us another very apt illustration: “If, when a man is cold, you ask how long he should stand by the fire. Surely, until he is thoroughly warm and made fit for

²⁹ Ibid, pp.80, 81

³⁰ Ibid, p.83

³¹ Ibid, p.83

his work.” It may be argued that the pace and total change in modern life compared to when Watson lived may impact the time spent on meditation, but whatever the circumstances it is the Christian’s duty to give God that which is urged upon us by Watson when he says, “Let this be the Christian’s resolution, not to leave off his meditations of God until he finds something of God in Him.” Or, as we read in Song of Solomon 5:4 and 8:6, when he sees some “moving of affections after God” “some flaming of love”.³²

The “benefit and usefulness of meditation” is set out under several particulars, which emphasise that meditation “is an excellent means to profit from the Word;” “makes the heart serious;” “is the bellows of affections;” “fits a man for holy duties;” “is a strong antidote against sin;” and “a cure for covetousness.” In opening the first of these particulars: “meditation is an excellent means to profit by the Word,” Watson reminds us that the hearing or reading of God’s word will bring “a truth into the head, but meditation brings it into the heart.” In a further reference to hearing the Word preached Watson informs us that “Many complain that they do not profit from sermons.” This is a sad comment, but for Watson the “chief reason” why they do not gain any profit from sermons is because “they do not chew the cud; they do not meditate on what they have heard.”³³

Sermons may bring us some knowledge of God’s Word, but we need to progress beyond knowledge itself. And this is where meditating on the sermon comes into play, for it will make the heart serious in the things of God. “Bible knowledge without meditation,” says Watson, “makes us no better than devils! Satan is an angel of light, yet he is black enough.” If we want to have a heart that is serious in the things of God, we need it to be like a well ballasted ship, which “is not so soon overturned by the wind.” Such a heart “is not so soon overturned by vanity.” Neither is it blown into any opinion or vice.” Indeed “the more serious the heart grows, the more spiritual; and the more spiritual, the more it resembles the Father of spirits.” Truly it is “meditation that brings the heart into this blessed frame. Meditation is the bellows of the affections.”³⁴

³² Ibid, p.84

³³ Ibid, pp.85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 85

³⁴ Ibid, p.86

Failure to “warm ourselves more at the fire of meditation” results in “our affections [being] so chill and cold in spiritual things.” So chill and cold that the soul is not fit for holy duties. It is like the hard ground that first needs to be broken up before the seed can be sown, and this meditation does; it softens the heart so the seed of the Word can be sown in the heart. In this way, Watson argues, we become fit for holy duties, such as prayer, which is “the spiritual pulse of the soul by which it beats strongly after God.” Taking the example of Christ Watson says, “When Christ was upon the mount, then he prayed. Just so, when the soul is upon the mount of meditation, now it is in tune for prayer.”³⁵

Before closing this section on the usefulness of meditation Watson shows that meditation is not only “a strong antidote against sin,” it is also a good means to banish vain and sinful thoughts.” On the first point Watson sets forth his evidence by way of a question; “Would [men] be so brutishly sensual as they are if they seriously meditated on what sin is?” He then describes what sin is by another question; “Would they take this viper in their hands if they did but consider its sting?” and this makes his point very well.³⁶

The second point: “vain and sinful thoughts” leads Watson to remark that “the thoughts are the first plotters and contrivers of evil.” Indeed, “The mind and imagination are the stage where sin is first acted.” What Watson is saying here is that in regard to sin our thoughts are no different to our actions; to think evil is to commit evil. This is made clear when he says, “The impure person acts over immorality in his thoughts; he contemplates wickedness.” This is but to echo the Words of Christ in Matthew 5. The solution, for Watson, is to meditate on God’s Word, for “the Word of God is pure (Psalm 119:140)—not only subjectively, but objectively. It makes them pure who meditate on it.”³⁷

This is a great truth, and it shows there is an excellency in meditating on God’s Word. Such excellency that it acts as a “golden ladder by which the [saints] ascend to paradise” and in so doing “[it] brings God and the soul together.” These truths also enable the Christian to take “a measure of his heart, whether it be good or bad” for as the writer of Proverbs says, “as he thinks in his heart,

³⁵ Ibid, pp.87, 88

³⁶ Ibid, pp.88, 90, 89

³⁷ Ibid, p.90

so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Oh, Christian, taking this text to heart we can say with Watson, “As thoughts of God bring delight with them, so they leave peace behind them.” Furthermore, meditation acts as a husbandman in the garden of the heart as “it plucks up the weeds of sin...prunes the wasteful branches...waters the flowers of grace and sweeps all the walks in the heart so that Christ may walk there with delight.”³⁸

Summarizing Watson, we can say that the nature of meditation is to bring us into a mindfulness of the things pertaining to God’s revelation of Himself. The mindfulness of the matter suggests a retention of the subject meditated on, in order to benefit from it. If this is true, as I believe it is, then the necessity of meditation cannot be downplayed. Indeed, by not meditating on God’s Word, “we make ourselves guilty of slighting God and His Word” for it comes to us “as a royal edit.”³⁹

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

Martin, R.P., *A Guide to the Puritans*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997)

Murray, I.H., *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971).

Thomas Watson’s Works:

A Body of Divinity: (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998).

The Christian on the Mount Ed, Dr D. Kistler, (Orlando, FL,: The Northampton Press, 2007).

The Art of Divine Contentment (PA: Soli Deo Gloria, Morgan, from the 1835 edition).

All things for Good (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988).

The Godly Man’s Picture (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992).

³⁸ Ibid, pp.92, 93, 94

³⁹ Ibid, p.67

Other Puritan Authors:

Bayly, Lewis, *The Practice of Piety* (PA: Soli Deo Gloria, Morgan, nd).

Bunyan, John *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).

Burroughs, Jeremiah: *A Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964).

Burroughs, Jeremiah, *Gospel Worship* Ed. Dr Don Kistler, (PA: Soli Deo Gloria, Morgan, 1990).

Flavel, John, *Keeping the Heart* Ed. Dr D. Kistler, (PA: Soli Deo Gloria, Morgan, 1998).

Sibbes, Richard: *The Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, revised ed. 1998).

Vincent, Thomas: *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1993)