

HONEYCOMB

Psalm 19:9-10

9 The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

Special Music: “Honeycomb Song”

Gatherhouse Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvMJZ5V2Blk>



HONEY FROM THE HONEYCOMB

Patty Smithers took the call from Katie Calloway on her cell phone. Katie was beside herself. She had gone out to feed her chickens this morning and discovered bees swarming around her back porch. She was afraid that her daughters might get stung, but she also knew how important bees were to the economy. The farms in the area needed the cross-pollination benefits from the bees in order to have a healthy harvest come fall. So, instead of trying to get rid of the bees herself, she called Patty to come retrieve them. Being the owner of Honey Rock Farms, Patty was always the expert to call when it came to bees. Patty told her that she would be over shortly to extricate the nest.

At the time she received the call, Patty was in the processing shed with Chester Plesky, her new hire. Chester was an insurance agent from Chicago who had come to her the month before looking to retire from the insurance industry and start somewhere fresh. He had no experience with bees, but had answered Patty's add in the Bulletin. When Patty said that he could have the job, Chester had packed his bags and moved to Parable. There weren't many people that would do that.

Chester was a fast learner, especially for someone in his mid 60's, and had been diligent as Tammy's assistant. She had started him out in the production shed. A lot of the work in the shed was grunt work, but she hadn't had help in a while and had fallen behind in her orders. Chester had been a huge help getting

her caught and pushing honey orders out the door. Chester was just putting the label on a box going to San Antonio and was about to start on the next order.

“Hold up, Chester,” Patty called out. “Time to get some practical experience in the field. Katie Callaway has a bee problem, and we are going to solve it for her. It’s time you learned to rescue bees, which is a very important part of our business. Follow me. I have something for you. It just came in yesterday.”

Chester didn’t know what it could be, but he followed Patty out to the storage shed. She opened the door and pulled out a large box. They both looked at the box expecting the other to open it. “Oh, come on Chester, open the box. It’s not going to bite you!” said Patty

Chester looked a little sheepish but then bent down and opened the box. In it there was a new white bee suit. He knew that Patty had several bee suits herself, but none of them would have fit Chester. This new one was just his size. He realized that Patty was about to teach him the basics of bee recovery. While she had taught him about hives and hive maintenance, he hadn’t had the opportunity to harvest honey or go with her on a rescue yet. There was a certain amount of reticence, okay, let’s call it fear, of actually participating in a bee rescue. But he knew that this was part of what he had gotten himself into.

“You’re welcome,” said Patty, and Chester realized he hadn’t thanked her.

“Thank you, Tammy. I really appreciate this.”

Patty had seen that look of apprehension in a person's eyes before. There was nothing in the world like being baptized into beekeeping with a bee rescue. She hoped the bees would be gentle with him.

"Okay, Chester, I want you to put your new suit and an empty hive into the back of the truck. Then grab the rescue kit from the shed and put it in there as well. Make sure to toss in a bag of pine needles and a couple of buckets as well. You good with that?"

"Got it, Patty. It should only take me a few minutes."

Chester gathered up what they needed and soon they were off to Katie's place. Katie was waiting for them when they arrived, and they parked the truck near the back porch. Just like Katie had said, there were bees all around the porch. Patty told Chester to unload the truck while Katie showed her around. There was a gap in the siding of the house where Patty could see bees coming and going, staying busy, as bees are prone to do in the Spring. She explained to Katie that they were going to have to remove the siding where the bees were in order to rescue them. She would also call Forrest Blankenship, the local handyman, to come put the siding back on and seal it up to help avoid the problem in the future. Patty then returned to the truck where Chester had unloaded the things they would need.

"Go ahead and put on your suit, Chester," she said.

"But what about you, Patty. You didn't have me load one for you," he replied.

“I don’t usually wear one on a rescue, Chester. I don’t really need it. These bees are friendly enough. They probably lost their nest in a storm and swarmed until they found this place. They just needed a place to stay. We are going to give them a better place to stay. Go ahead and load the smoker with pine needles and lit it up. The smoke will help keep them calm. Bring the smoker and a pry bar and join me on the porch.”

Chester did as he was instructed and found his way to the porch area where the bees were still buzzing about. Patty took the smoker and gave a few puffs into the area where the bees were working, and they seemed to calm down a little. She then had Chester take the pry bar and start prying the siding from the house. The nails screeched with age, but the wood was not that difficult to remove.

Inside the wall of the house was a large nest of honeycomb, layered like plates and secured to the frame of the wall. Chester was amazed the bees didn’t rush out and attacked them both. The bees didn’t seem to care much about the intrusion. The sun cast its rays over the golden plates catching the honey as it dripped from the comb. How intricate and beautiful the comb stretched between the frames of the wall. It seemed a shame to destroy it.

Patty seemed to be reading his mind because she said, “Oh, we aren’t going to destroy it. We are going to preserve it and the bees will be so much happier with their new home. Now go get the new hive, the large knife from the kit and bring the two buckets as well.”

Chester had a hard time taking his eye from the hive. It was almost mesmerizing to watch. But Patty gave him a little shove that seemed to break his reverie, and he did as he was told. It took him two trips to bring everything. Patty had him set up the new hive near the open wall. She then began the task of carefully cutting the comb and placing it in the buckets. Chester was amazed that the bees didn't attempt to sting her. She placed the comb in the buckets and then removed the frames from the new hive. Gently, she wrapped the comb inside each frame and placed the frame back into the new hive. She left one smaller piece of comb in a bucket. Patty then began to use her hands to scoop the bees into the new hive while watching intently, trying to spot the queen. When she found the queen, she put it into a little clip and attached it between the frames. Like magic, all the bees began moving into the new hive. Not once did Patty get stung. The bees seemed to know that she was trying to help them.

Shaking the remaining bees from her hand into the new hive, Patty gently put the top on. The bees continued to move from the wall to the new hive. "It will take them a while to move into their new home. We will leave them alone for the night and come back in the morning to collect the hive and what honey we can salvage. Now for the best part. Go ahead and take off your hood. They probably won't sting you. They're too busy moving into their new digs."

Chester hesitantly removed his hood while he watched Patty cut the small honeycomb she had saved into two pieces and handed him one. She bit into the one she had kept for herself, and her eyes blazed with delight.

"Go ahead Chester. This is your reward."

Chester bit into his piece of honeycomb and immediately understood. It was the most heavenly thing he had ever tasted. To think, they had just saved a colony of bees by giving them a new home. And the taste of that honeycomb in his mouth was well worth all the anxiety he had felt. Choosing to be a part of this journey with Patty was probably the best decision he had ever made.

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The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

**10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.**

In 1922, in the tomb of Tutankhomanon, archeologist Howard Carver found jars containing honey. Many other artifacts had been looted from the chambers, but the honey jars were intact. But that wasn't the amazing part. What people found so very baffling was that the honey was still edible. Imagine, 3000 year-old honey which is still edible. And that isn't the oldest honey ever found.

Honey has very little water content and the naturally occurring enzymes and acids create an environment that prevents bacteria from growing in it. This bacterium free syrup also has great healing properties for wounds and burns. It does not spoil or break down. It's good for the heart and a better sweetener than raw or processed sugar.

Beekeeping is first encountered in ancient Egypt where processed honey is used in medicines and for spiritual practices. But it wasn't until the eighteenth century that the importance of bees themselves was discovered. It's one thing to love a good bite of honeycomb and another to begin to see the bigger picture regarding the crucial job that bees play in our food supply. Estimates say that up to 30% of the foods available to us are directly dependent on the work of the common honeybee. The bee provides the cross pollination that is necessary for many fruits and vegetables to flourish.

I could talk at length about the nature of bees and honey and how important they are for our survival. I could talk even longer about how bees are struggling to acclimate to climate change and to the use of pesticides. It is a sad but true fact that the bee population of the world drops further every year. That decline in the bee population is having a huge impact on the crops we produce to feed ourselves. Most of us have a hard time understanding that bees are intricately tied to humanity's ultimate survival. But let me suffice it to say that we must work harder to find ways to overcome the issues that are decimating the bee population so that we can continue with the symbiotic relationship that we share with bees.

Let's break down our scripture for today. In this passage of Psalm 19, David is comparing the decrees of God with the properties we find in gold and honey. It is easy for us to step into the comparison with gold because, just as in the time of David, we value gold as a precious metal today. It is valued, treasured, cherished. We tend to make our most important tokens, rings, jewelry, and trophies either out of gold or resembling gold. Gold is a pinnacle of standards. When it comes to awarding medals, gold is always the best. So, David is telling us that God's decrees should be cherished, much in the same way that humans cherish gold. God decrees are decrees that should be held higher than any other. They should be 'golden'.

But why honey? Why does David think that God's decrees are like honey? Many of the things that make honey valuable are more intrinsic than monetary. If

we apply those same adjectives to God decrees that we apply to honey, look what we fine:

- 1. Just like honey, God's decrees never decay or become inedible. They are always pertinent and never grow stale. They stand the test of time. What was important before, is still important today. God decrees don't lose their flavor with time. They never become irrelevant.**
- 2. Just like honey has great healing properties for the body, God's decrees have great healing properties for the soul. When we are lost, confused, hurting, or discouraged, we can turn to the words of God's decrees to soothe our hearts and bring healing to that which be thought could never be healed.**
- 3. And just like honey, God's decrees are sweet to the taste. They leave us wanting more. They leave such a wonderful taste in our minds, we beg to grow in spirit and taste whatever comes next. There is no bitterness in the decrees of God. Any bitterness we find is not from God's decrees, but our own selfish and bitter natures as we try to bend those decrees to match our earthly desires rather than the nature of heaven.**

And the best tasting honey comes directly from the comb. The best decrees we will ever hear come directly from our Heavenly Father. Why do so many of us strive to avoid tasting the honey that God gives to us freely.

The Bible is filled with references to honey and honeycomb. “Honey from the rock.” “Land of milk and honey.” John the Baptist survived on honey and locusts. David uses a reference to honey in many of his Psalms. So, when David talks about God’s decrees, he is giving us a reference to what he believes to be the perfect food; sweet, natural, sustainable, nourishing, with all the properties we need for our spiritual growth.

Which begs the question, “What does that have to do with me, preacher?” Do we thirst after the sweet syrup of God’s decrees? Or have we lost our taste for them? Rather than seeing those decrees as the perfect spiritual food for the health of our soul, are we picking and choosing what we take into our soul and ignoring the rest? Maybe we have gotten to the point where we don’t care much for God’s honey and choose to only eat what tastes good to our decaying spirits, not desiring to heal, resigned to stagnation and rot.

I will never tell you that embedding the words of Christ in your heart will be easy. It takes work. It takes willpower. It takes fortitude. It takes desire. But what you get in return for your effort is more valuable than gold, sweeter than the honey from the honeycomb. But you have to want it and be willing to work for it, just like Chester in our story today. He had to work to be able to get to a point where he could take a bite of honey from that honeycomb and taste its sweetness.

There is nothing like the taste of honey that Christ offers us. I encourage you to work towards getting a taste of the honeycomb he brings to the table.

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God bless you all!

AMEN