

A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Jesus is Better

Sermon # 8

“The Transforming Power of the Word of God.”

Hebrews 4:12-13

I was thirteen years old when I first became aware of being under the scalpel of God’s word. It was then that I heard and understood clearly that I was a sinner and as such had no right to eternity in heaven. I don’t remember who was preaching or what he was preaching about but I do remember being cut through with the conviction of my sin. There and then in a small rural Methodist church I received Jesus Christ as my personal savior. That was my first experience with the penetrating power of the Word of God but it would not be my last. Over the years there have been many times that the Word of God has cut me and convicted me.

Today we come to the classic text on the power of the Word of God in Hebrews 4:12-13. Would you join me in turning in your Bible as I read the text?

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

This section begins with “for” or “therefore” tying what follows with what the author has previously told us about the consequences

of Israel's disobedience. The author wants us to get it through our thick heads that Israel's awful tragedy can strike us as well.

Today I want you to see with me four reasons why we should not disregard the Word of God!

First, It is A Living Word (v. 12a)

"For the word of God is living..."

The Bible, the word of God, is unlike any other book you have in your home or in the library. The Library of Congress lays claims to being the largest library in the world, with more than 130 million items on approximately 530 miles of bookshelves. The collections include more than 29 million books and other printed materials, 2.7 million recordings, 12 million photographs, 4.8 million maps, and 58 million manuscripts. Yet among all these volumes the only ones that can lay claims to being alive and powerful are copies of the Bible. This places the Bible in a unique category all to itself.

The word "living" (*zon*) is placed in the emphatic position in the original language. The word of God is no dead letter, but as the word of the living God it cannot itself fail to be living. As the living word it continues through each age with compelling relevance. *"Gipsy Smith told of a man who said he had received no inspiration from the Bible although he had "gone through it several times." "Let it go through you once," replied Smith, "then you will tell a different story!"* [source unknown - www.bible.org/illus/Bible (application)]

The Word of God is not only a living word but ...

Secondly, It is an Powerful Word (v 12b)

"For the word of God is living and powerful."

The word translated "powerful" (*energes*) is the word from which we get energy and energetic. The word literally means "at work."

Charles Swindoll comments, "News articles may inform us. Novels may inspire us. Poetry may enrapture us. But only the living, active Word of God can transform us." [Charles Swindoll, p. 73]

"One of the most dramatic examples of the Bible's divine ability to transform men and women involved the famous mutiny on the "Bounty." Following their rebellion against the notorious Captain Bligh, nine mutineers, along with the Tahitian men and women who accompanied them, found their way to Pitcairn Island, a tiny dot in the South Pacific only two miles long and a mile wide. Ten years later, drink and fighting had left only one man alive—John Adams. Eleven women and 23 children made up the rest of the Island's population.

So far this is the familiar story made famous in the book and motion picture. But the rest of the story is even more remarkable. About this time, Adams came across the "Bounty's" Bible in the bottom of an old chest. He began to read it, and the divine power of God's Word reached into the heart of that hardened murderer on a tiny volcanic speck in the vast Pacific Ocean—and changed his life forever. The peace and love that Adams found in the Bible entirely replaced the old life of quarreling, brawling, and liquor. He began to teach the children from the Bible until every person on the island had experienced the same amazing change that he had found. Today, with a population of slightly less than 100, nearly every person on Pitcairn Island is a Christian. [Signs of the Times, August, 1988, p. 5. -

www.bible.org/illus/Bible (changes it makes)]

Well, it is...living and active...and so when we read its words they reach out and touch the needs of our lives in an almost tangible way. Isaiah 55:11 describes scripture as being a living agent or messenger that God sends to touch our lives. Listen to what God says in this passage... "*My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*" So, unlike any other book, *the Bible is living and powerful and...*

Third, It is a Penetrating Word (v 12c)

"... sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow..."

Like a sharp sword which can lay open the human body with one slashing blow, so the sword of the Scripture can open our inner life and expose it to ourselves and to others.

In the Roman world there were two distinctly different swords. There was the large sword, it was long, heavy and destructive. And there was a short sword (*machaira*), it was lightweight and double-edged and deadly because it cut both ways. This is what Peter used to cut off the ear of the servant of the High priest in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:47).

What the author is saying is that God's Word can reach into the innermost recesses of our being! No heart is too tough and no soul is too dark. "When God wills it, his word can pierce anyone as a certain Mr. Thorpe in the 18th century Bristol found out. Thorpe was a part of a band of men who called themselves, the 'Hell Fire Club.' Their reason for existence was to mock and ridicule the work of the famed evangelist, George Whitefield. On one occasion, the 'Hell-Fire Club'

gathered at a pub for such mockery. Mr. Thorpe offered his brilliant imitation of Whitefield, whom he and his friends called, 'Mr Squintum' because of Whitefield eyes. He delivered his sermon with brilliant accuracy, perfectly imitating his tone and facial expressions as he quoted Scripture and Whitefield's exposition. Suddenly amidst the laughter he had to sit down for he was pierced through and was converted on the spot.

Mr. Thorpe was a thoroughly nasty man, engaged in a nasty action yet the Word of God pierced his heart and changed him in an instant. Mr. Thorpe went on to be a prominent Christian leader in the city of Bristol" [C. H. Spurgeon. The Metropolitan Pulpit. Vol. 34. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Pub, 1974) p. 115]

The Word of God Is Not Only A Penetrating Word but...

Fourth, It is a Discerning Word (vv. 12d -13) *"...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*

From this passage I want us to glean three truths.

- God Sees Everything There Is No Escape.

We want God to see us when we are hurting and when we are going through difficult times. We want Him to see and come to our aid. But when it comes to our sin and wrongdoing we would rather that God looked the other way. But verse twelve concludes by saying that the Word of God *"... is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* The word *"discerner"* (*kritikos*) is the word from which we get critic. As the word of God penetrates into the innermost recesses of man's being it does so as his critic or judge.

- God Sees Everything There Is No Hiding.

Only the Word of God is capable of exposing the thoughts and attitudes of a single human heart. There really is no use in hiding. Why is it when we fear that some-thing is not quite right physically we tend to put off going to the doctor because we fear we will hear bad news. The same is true spiritually.

Verse thirteen says that before God "*all things are naked*" or literally "*laid bare.*" The word (*tetrachelismena*) literally refers to bending someone's neck backward so the face is looking upwards. It is a vivid term describing either the grip of a wrestler on the neck of his opponent or the grip on the neck of a sacrificial victim prepared for sacrifice. And sometimes it was used to describe how a man being led to execution had a knife placed beneath his chin so that he could not hang his head in shame and those avoid the gaze of the onlookers. Whatever the exact nature of the picture that is being drawn here it means that to be in the grip of an all powerful God is to be vulnerable, helpless and to have all our secrets known.

The Word of God possesses the diagnostic perception that picks up inconsistency even in motivation. With God we cannot smooth over with outward actions, the real intentions of our hearts. We may appear to be sincere to others but God knows if there is an ulterior motive.

- God Sees Everything There Is No Excuse.

The last part of verse thirteen says, all things are "*... open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*" This verse plainly tells us that there is a coming day of reckoning upon which we will each

give an account for our lives. The day of excuses will be over, the book of Romans tells us there is coming a time *"when every mouth will be stopped"* (Rom 3:19), there will be no more excuses. The Apostle Paul warns in 2 Cor. 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*

Let me conclude by sharing something written many years ago by Samuel Chadwick. "I have guided my life by the Bible for more than sixty years, and I tell you there is no book like it. It is a miracle of literature, a perennial spring of wisdom, a wonder of surprises, a revelation of mystery, an infallible guide of conduct, and an unspeakable source of comfort. Pay no attention to people who discredit it, for I tell you that they speak without knowledge. It is the Word of God itself. Study it according to its own direction. Live by its principles. Believe its message. Follow its precepts.

No man is uneducated who knows the Bible, and no one is wise who is ignorant of its teachings." [Samuel Chadwick from 1001 Great Stories and Quotes. R. Kent Hughes. (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1998) p. 77]

Application

The challenge for us is always at least two-fold.

First, we must ask ourselves if we are being challenged by the word of God to take some action before we leave this place. Perhaps like me when I was thirteen, the Word of God has captured your attention and convicted you of your sin and convinced you that you need to do something about it, today. If that is the case, then I want to invite in just a few moments when we sing the closing hymn, to

come and settle the matter of eternity today, before you leave this place.

Secondly, we should always think through the application of what I we hear preached or read. We should pay enough attention to what the Word of God may be saying to us to write it down and think it over. Asking the question, "*What action does God want me to take concerning this truth in my life?*"