

THE WORD OF GOD

Sermon – Bible Sunday, January 3, 2016

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book and been unable to recall even the basic premise or plot? People ask you what movie you have just seen or what book you have just read and you find you can't recall much about it. A few things may stick in your mind but most everything has been relegated to the far reaches of the cranium universe, seemingly irrelevant and irretrievable.

Or maybe you're one of those who don't care for reading so you have no interest in books. Or who rarely see movies so they become more of a social event to plan things around rather than something to be enjoyed in and of itself.

There are many types of people and the word of God was written for all of them – for those who like to read and for those who don't. Why can I say this? Because all of us were created with a thirst for God and God, in His infinite wisdom, has determined that writing down His words would be a beneficial and necessary thing for us to have.

God has said that His word would not return void but would accomplish what He has planned for it to do. God also says that the Scriptures speak of Him.

Now probably all of us here today have heard this before – that God speaks through His word and that His word does not return void. But we may have also read the word of God at one time or another and really felt that it was boring and hard to understand. Sometimes when we read Scripture it is like reading that book that we cannot quite recall after we have read it. Like looking into a mirror and after walking away immediately forgetting what we looked like. Sometimes the word of God can be like that, if we read it at all.

I must admit that in my 48 years of being a believer I have not spent every year reading my Bible. There were many years where I was not taught that reading God's word was important. I understood that I had to be careful who I listened to on the radio and in the pulpit, but understanding the Word of God for myself was not something that was passed down to me from my church leaders.

Then there were the years where I read sporadically, just enough to be able to pass for someone who knew the word of God within my circle of friends, but not enough to really know the word of God. Sort of like exposing myself to the inoculation of Scripture so that I didn't have to get the disease of Scripture. You know – become a Bible thumper, a seminary snob, a knowledge nut.

Then 23 years ago I came to Church of the Valley and heard our former pastor speak every single year on reading through the Bible in a year. In fact it was at this time every year that he would dust off the same old sermon and tell us we should be reading through the Bible in a year.

For the first year or so I heard myself say (internally) "yeah, yeah, whatever. That's good for you but I just can't get into it. You like to study. You went to seminary, you're a pastor, you HAVE to read it every year. I'm not obligated like you are. I have a "choice" and I choose to read it whenever and however often I want. And right now I don't want to. Besides when I try to read it I get bogged down in Leviticus and that's only the third book. How am I supposed to finish the whole thing in one year when I can't even get past the third book?" (You see, even worship leading pastors are human.)

Then about 18 years ago I decided that what I heard Billy Graham say many, many years ago may be true. He said, “Sin can keep you from the Word of God, or the Word of God can keep you from sin.” And I thought, well, I certainly am sinning and I certainly am not reading the Word of God, so maybe I should try reading it, like Dave has said, and see if I can see some improvement.

At first, after I made the commitment to read through the Bible in a year I didn’t find it hard. I made a decision and a personal covenant to do it so I was going to stick to the plan. But about the time summer came and I took some vacation time away from my routine I found myself easily ignoring the reading plan. Before I knew it summer had passed and I had not read a single word for three months. I was very discouraged as I looked at what was left to read and knew, just knew that I would not be able to catch up and finish by the end of the year. So I stopped.

The next year was better but I still did not finish the whole Bible that year. Once again I waivered in my commitment and when I did I felt guilty and when I felt guilty I did not want to read. Hum, there were those words again – Sin can keep you from the word of God or the Word of God can keep you from sin.

Then one Sunday the pastor said that all of us will falter in our reading schedule. But when we do it was important not to be discouraged. You didn’t have to feel guilty or bound to a set of reading rules. Simply pick up the Book and start on whatever day it was. The important thing was to read, not to be in bondage to reading.

So I picked it up again and finished Revelation for the first time that year. No, I did not find myself reading every single day or reading every single page of Scripture that year. But I did find something much more important. I found the freedom to read as often as I could. And I found myself set free from the bondage of a planned schedule.

After that first “successful” year I found a way to make the daily reading of God’s word work for me. I bought myself a Daily Bible where the Scriptures are divided into 365 daily reading. I found this method worked well for me. I did not chafe at the predetermined schedule and I did not resent it when I got behind. In fact I found myself on several occasions days or even weeks ahead of schedule.

You know, I can’t say that as a result of reading my Bible through in a year for the past 18 years I have become a walking encyclopedia of Biblical knowledge. But what I can say is this:

1. I HAVE FOUND MYSELF SINNING LESS AND UNDERSTANDING GOD MORE.

PSALM 40:8

“I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

PSALM 119:11

“Your word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against Thee. (KJ)

2. I HAVE FOUND MYSELF BETTER ABLE TO DISCERN GOOD FROM EVIL, RIGHT FROM WRONG, AND TRUTH FROM ERROR.

PSALM 119:105

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”

3. I HAVE FOUND MYSELF BELIEVING WHAT THE WORD OF GOD SAYS BECAUSE I AM EXPERIENCING IT.

JOHN 14:26

“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

4. I HAVE FOUND MYSELF SEEING THINGS I NEVER SAW BEFORE, INCLUDING THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

I remember one particular year where I had not finished my reading of the New Testament but it was time to start the Old Testament again. So I decided to finish reading the New Testament at the same time as I was reading the Old Testament. And I found myself reading about things in Revelation that I was reading about in the books of Moses. The stones upon the priest were the same stones mentioned in Revelation. In Ezekiel I saw the same four creatures, and the angels who were placing a seal on the foreheads of believers, and the leaves of the trees that will be for healing as I saw in Revelation. And I saw things from Isaiah and Exodus in Revelation as well. It was amazing.

5. AND I HAVE SEEN HOW OFTEN CHRIST IS MENTIONED OR PORTRAYED IN THE WORD OF GOD – NOT JUST IN THE NEW BUT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AS WELL

Jesus speaks to the Scribes and Pharisees in John chapter 5 and says the following:

JOHN 5:39-47

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

The Scriptures Jesus is referring to is the Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been written. So Jesus is saying that the Old Testament testifies about Jesus, and that even Moses wrote about Jesus. Once we finish our study of Philippians I intend to take us through the Old Testament looking at the places where Jesus can be seen.

Let me make one final point about the word of God. The Word of God is critical to the believer's life because it is able to do the following:

- a) The Word Of God Produces Faith

The word of God allows you to hear the voice of God. And hearing God speak allows you to believe, which produces saving faith.

ROMANS 10:17

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

b) The Word Of God Is Able To Judge The Thoughts And Intents Of The Heart

HEBREWS 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

c) The Word Of God Is Able To Build You Up

ACTS 20:32

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

d) The Word Of God Is Able To Encourage You

ROMANS 15:4

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

And so I want to encourage you to read through your Bible this year. If you’ve tried before but have been discouraged as I was, simply start again. Don’t let discouragement stop you from enjoying the benefits of getting closer to God through His word.

If you haven’t ever done it before make this the year you start. And if you need some help I have just the thing for you. I have purchased a few “One Year” Bibles in the New Living Translation . If you are in need of one and cannot afford to buy your own let me know and I will be happy to give you one.

But no matter what translation or method you use the important thing is to read your Bible and to read it consistently. For if you hide His word in your heart you will be much more likely to not sin against Him. Take it from me, someone who knows. Reading Scripture helps to avoid sin because it softens your heart to His word and to His will. Try it this year. You may have to spend 15 minutes a day reading but I guarantee that the time spent in God’s word will turn out to be best the investment you have ever made.

Lord, as the world continues to forsake You and belittle your Word make us into people who live the words of God. Not as some, who are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good, but as those who live out the Word in practical ways of love and service to others. Help us to find the strength to persevere in the midst of trials and troubles by reaching out to Your Word for guidance and instruction. May we never stray from the Truth which Your Word brings to life within its pages; and may we speak and shine the light of that truth for all to see. In the name of Jesus who is revealed throughout all of Scripture as the source of eternal life and internal peace, in His name we pray. Amen.

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