

THE WORD OF GOD – Part One
Sermon – Bible Sunday, January 13, 2019

God's word is like no other. There is life and peace found within its pages. Forgiveness and grace saturate each page of God's Holy Word. Like other books God's word contains mystery, murder, mayhem, and malice. Evil and good, sexual sin and sexual purity, idolatry and incest, submission and rebellion, judgment and redemption all can be found within the pages of the Bible. God does not sugarcoat the history of His dealings with man.

Unlike other books, however, 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; or the movie we've just seen where we can't remember the plot or the main actor's name. It's 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 nearly 51 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 and become a Bible thumper, a seminary snob, or Scriptural knowledge nut.

But when I came to this church over 25 years ago I 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 21 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 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 waived 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 readings. 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 21 years I have become a walking encyclopedia of Biblical knowledge. But what I can say is this:

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)”

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”

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.”

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

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

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 placed on the priestly garments mentioned in Leviticus 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.

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

Luke 24:27

“Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, (Jesus) explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

The Scriptures Jesus is referring to is the Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been written. So Jesus was explaining what the Old Testament said about Him,

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:

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.”

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.”

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.”

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 a Bible you can read we can help. I recommend the “One Year” Bible in large Print in the New Living Translation. If you would like one and cannot afford to buy your own let me know and I will be happy to order you one. And by the way, if you have difficulty reading there are several places in the internet that you can go and hear someone read the Bible to you. I'm sure someone here could help you with that.

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. Help us to see Jesus as He is revealed throughout all of Scripture as the source of eternal life and internal peace, for it is in His name we pray. Amen.

Unless otherwise noted all scriptures have been taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.