

**The Filter of the Word:
May 2, 2021**

When you are preparing a sermon...
For me... there are two basic ways...
To look at the texts. **[1 Big Picture]**

The first is the 10,000 foot view.
I look at **ALL** the lessons...
Or at least at the whole gospel lesson...
And try to find...
The golden thread.

The one idea... the theme...
That emerges from the text...
The voice of God...
Speaking to us...
Through the Word.

So today...
If I had to summarize the gospel...
In one of those flashy...
Easy to remember phrases...
That make everyone feel good...

I would say... **[2 The Vine]**
Religion without relationship is fruitless.
Get it? We don't bear fruit... without relationships.

Jesus emphasizes how important it is...
For us to be connected to him.

It's like a vine...
And the branches shoot off that vine.
Sure the fruit hangs at the end of the branches...
But if the branches are NOT connected...
To the vine...

They don't get what they need...
To produce fruit.

No water.
No nutrients.
No strength.
No support.
Nothing.

Well. Same thing.
If we are NOT connected to Jesus.
If we do not have...
A relationship with him...
Then we don't produce...
The fruit... that comes from faith.

Pretty clear...
When you look at the gospel...
From 10,000 feet...
It seems easy peasy.

But that's not how...
I ALWAYS look at the texts...
When I prepare a sermon. **[3 Micro]**

Sometimes...
I focus in... like a microscopic view...
There is a single word...
Or a phrase...
That catches my attention...

That jumps out at me...
And demands...
That I figure out...
What the heck...
God is talking about...
In those few words.

That happened with today's lesson.

The phrase that demanded my attention...
Was what Jesus says...
In the middle of his otherwise seamless monologue...
About the vine... and branches... and fruit. **[4 John 15:3]**

Jesus said...
You have already been cleansed...
By the word...
That I have spoken to you.

Sticks out... like a metaphorical sore thumb.

So listen... there was this guy named Bill
Who wanted to buy... a horse. **[5 Horse]**
So he goes on his computer...
And searches Craigslist...
For a brand new horse.

Bill saw an ad that caught his attention...
For sale... a Christian horse...
He had no idea... what that meant...
So he went to check it out.

When Bill got to the ranch,
The horse's owner said
Yep. He's a Christian horse.

And it's easy to ride him.
Just say 'praise the Lord'... to make him go,

And 'amen'... to make him stop."
So... he thought he should...
Take the horse for a test drive.

Bill got up on the horse
And said "praise the Lord."
And lo and behold... he horse started to walk.

But Bill wanted to go faster...
See what the horse could do...
So he said...
Praise the Lord.
The horse started to trot.

It was going well...
So Bill really wanted to push...
To open it up... full throttle...

So he said...
"Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord"
And the horse took off... running...
Fast as the wind.

When all the sudden...
Bill noticed... they were running toward a cliff.
A pretty significant drop-off...
So Bill cries out... just as loud as he can... "
AMEN."

And just in the nick of time...
The horse stops... dead in his tracks...
And Bill filled with absolute relief says:
"Whew! Praise the lord!"

I think we all know... **[6 Words]**
That words have power.
They have the power to build up.
They have the power to tear down.

They have the power to encourage us...

Words also have the power...
To break our hearts...
Into little pieces.

Words have the power...
To join our lives...
To other people around us.

Think about the words...
In the speeches...
That have changed the nature...
Of our country.

Four score and seven years ago
Our fathers brought forth on this continent,
A new nation, conceived in Liberty,
And dedicated to the proposition that
All men are created equal.

Or how about...

I have a dream that
My four little children
Will one day live in a nation
Where they will not be judged by
The color of their skin
But by the content of their character.
I have a dream today.

Or how about...

We hold these truths to be self-evident,
That all men are created equal,
That they are endowed
By their Creator
With certain unalienable Rights,
That among these are Life, Liberty
And the pursuit of Happiness

All these words...
Have power in our communities...
And in our lives.

We acknowledge these as TRUTH...
And that gives them power.

Now in this gospel lesson...
Jesus is claiming that his WORD...
Has a power that is more than...
Any of the other words...
That impact our lives.

Jesus is saying...
That his Word.
The words he had spoken.
The words we have recorded...
In God's Holy Word...

The words around which...
We who claim to be Christians...
Build our lives.

He claims that his word...
Actually holds the power to cleanse us.

But how? **[7 CPAP]**

So I have a breathing machine...
A CPAP... that I have to wear at night...
So that I do not stop breathing while I sleep.
So that I survive until the morning.
Kind of dramatic...
Kind of true.

Anyway...
To clean my CPAP machine...
I have another machine...
That also sits on the nightstand...
Called SOCLEAN2.

But the filter expired.
You know... the filter inside the cleaning machine...
It runs ozone through the CPAP...
And captures all the junk and garbage...
And particulate grossness...
And I assume...
My uncommon halitosis.
All get caught in this filter.

That filter needed to be replaced.
They cost \$30 each.
Forget about it.
I'm not paying \$30...
For a tiny piece of plastic filter.

So... I went on the Amazon...
And I know it's not the Amazon...
It's just Amazon...
But I like to say it incorrectly...
So mind your own business...

Anyway...
I found a six pack of filters...
Which will last for three years...
Knock off brand...
For \$21.

But you can't just buy something...
On Amazon Smile...
All willy nilly...
Without reading the specs...
And the reviews...

And these new filters...
Were overwhelming positive.
The only negative reviews...
Were about how the filters...

Must not be fitting into the machine correctly...
Because the warning light on the machine...
Didn't shut off...
After the people installed the new filter.

Well. I wondered.
So I looked up the manual...
And actually read the instructions.

After you install a new filter...
You need to manually reset the warning light.
It doesn't do it automatically.
You have to be involved.

All that trouble...
Just because I don't know how...
To breathe at night.
Argh.

So I was thinking about...
How the Words of Jesus... **[8 Filter]**
Could actually make the disciples...
CLEAN.

As he claims.
In this gospel lesson.

So what if it works like a filter.
What if... we use the words of Christ...
And run our lives through them.

So bear with me here.
We live our lives...
We have all these interactions.
All these thoughts.
All these words.
All this stuff...
That we carry around...
Inside of us.

And not everything is good.
We carry a lot of things...
That do not lead to life.

These things...
Hurt us...
And hurt other people around us.

So. For example...
If we carry around hate.
Easy example.

Like we hate a certain person...

Or a certain kind of people...
That sticks inside of us.
That starts to define who we are...
And the choices we make...
How we live our lives.

So... we begin to treat other people...
Like they are inferior to us.
Like they don't deserve our love...
And the good news we have to share.

We begin to say things...
That are hurtful...
Thus adding to the hate...
In this world.

And we begin to do things...
Thus adding to the hate...
That we all experience...
In this world.

And we become UNCLEAN.
Right? I mean... doesn't hate make us UNCLEAN.
If God is love... by definition...
Choosing hate is the opposite of love...
Therefore it is the opposite of God.

Well... whether we want to acknowledge it or not...
Hate does make us unclean.

And the way that we know for sure...
Is that we run it through the filter...
Of the Word of Christ.

Because as followers of the Christ...
We assume that his words are right.
And holy.
And given to us...
By God.

And we need to test our lives...
Against the word of Christ.

SO... when we run the concept...
Of hating other people...
Through the filter of our Lord and Savior...
And the words that he spoke...

Something should happen.
Just like the junk and garbage...
Gets caught in a filter...
That we have on...
Our breathing machines...
And our furnaces...

And our cars...
And everything else...
The junk gets caught...
In the filter of his word.

And what comes out the other side...
Should be a changed heart... that is clean. **[9 Hebrews 4-12]**

Hebrews 4:12
Indeed, the word of God is living and active,
Sharper than any two-edged sword,
Piercing until it divides soul from spirit,
Joints from marrow;
It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And you know...
That's one of the powers...
That the word of God...
Has in our lives.

We compare how we are living...
To how Jesus has called us to live...

And when we see that we have failed...
That indeed... we have fallen short...
Of the glory of God.
Which we all have...

Then we know... with certainty...
According to God's word...
That it's time to repent of our sin...
And start again.

Now... one caution. **[10 Proof Texting]**
The word of God...
Is not a club...
With which to beat...
Each other over the head.

It's not designed...
For us... to be self-righteous...
Justified... in our anger...

You know what I'm talking about...
How sometimes... people... will pick and choose...
One little tiny verse...
On which to focus...

And say... THIS IS THE TRUTH!...

It's called proof-texting...
And it can be very dangerous...

If you are trying to justify...
Bad ideas or bad behavior.
That are contrary to the overall will of God.
Like the verse...
Where Jesus curses the fig tree...
And it shrivels up and dies.

I don't think we are supposed to hate fig trees...
Or think that it's ok to curse things or people...
Until the shrivel up and die.

If you compare that one story...
To the rest of Jesus' mission and work...

And if you set it in the context...
Of the entire lesson...

You would start to understand...
That Jesus was frustrated and scared...
And had a sincerely human moment...
Where he lashed out...

It doesn't mean...
We are supposed to do the same things...
It means... the opposite... it means... he was like us.
And his life was hard sometimes.

Anyway...
God calls us to take the totality...
Of God's word...
Into our heart and mind.

And to actually be IN THE WORD.

You know what I mean...
Reading God's word at home...
Getting together with a friend...
To get into the word.

Going to a bible study.
Which both the Wednesday morning...
And the men's Wednesday evening...
Studies have resumed online.
AND YOU ARE WELCOME.

There are opportunities...
To continue to learn and grow...
In our understanding of God's word.

And besides...
God's word is living and moving...
And changing...
And working on us. **[11 Stream]**

It's like a stream... of water...
You stick your toe in a stream...
And two minutes later...
You stick your toe...
Into the exact same spot...

BUT it's not the same stream.
There is new water.
There is new life.
There is a whole different set...
Of circumstances.

The same with God's word.
You read one passage one day...
And it may not speak to your heart.

But the next day...
Or the next time you read...
The exact same verse...

It could be...
The most important word...
That you will ever hear.
Because it draws you closer to God.
And fills your heart with life.

Ok. Let's bring this home.
You remember when I said...
The knock off brand filters...
That I bought...
Had a few negative reviews.

Because people didn't know...
They needed to reset the machine...
After they put the new filter in.

I think that's a good analogy for us.

We need to be open to God's word... **[12 Open]**
Willing to reset our lives...
Based on what we learn.

Because if we engage with Christ...
In his word...

And expect nothing...
To happen to us...
Then guess what...

Nothing will happen.
Nothing to change.
Nothing to be reset.

However... when we read God's word...
With an open heart...
With a sincere desire...
To learn and grow...
And to change...

Then God will change us...
From the inside out.

But we should ask God...
To keep us steadfast in the Word.

Even before we open the book...
I think it's a good idea...
To pray.

And to ask the Holy Spirit...
To clean our hearts...
To filter our lives...
To change us..
And make us new.

Thanks be to God.
Amen!