

This is the third sermon in our series “More Precious Than Gold” considering the value of Scripture.

First, we looked at the metaphor of **bread**. Next, we considered the metaphor of the Bible as **light**. Today we are considering the picture of God’s Word as a **sword**.

We dare not approach God’s Word as a mere charm or some kind of talisman. Robert C. Preus writes,

In the Middle Ages certain monks would strap a Bible to their backs thinking that it would aid them wherever they went and ward off evil spirits. Ironically, many of these monks were not even able to read the Bible. Certainly this is not the power of Scripture. The power of Scripture is not a fetish; it is not something magical. (*Can We Trust The Bible*, Earl Radmacher, ed., Tyndale, 1979, 59)

Proposition

To consider how the Bible functions as a sword, we will look at two passages. Remember that the Bible as our light accomplishes **internal** inspection and **outward** illumination.

In a similar way, the Word of God as a sword has a powerful function for our **interior** lives as well as our **exterior** experience.

Howard and William Hendricks wrote,

On eleven different occasions, Jesus said to the most well-read people of His time, “Have you never read?” Of course they had. They had spent all of their lives reading. But they didn’t *understand* what they had read. (*Living By The Book*, Moody, 2007, 67)

Are you reading the Bible? Do you understand it? Metaphors, as one example, help to connect us to the truth of the Bible. Roman military might was so pervasive in the first Century, so the image of a sword was very accessible.

What prevented those who heard Jesus’ speaking from understanding what they heard? Was it that they had no desire to understand because they did not think Jesus, the Galilean, had anything to teach them?

[A] The Bible exposes what is within – Hebrews 4:12-13

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

This morning I would like us want to focus attention on these two verses, but to understand them we must give some attention to their context. The first step is to look at the paragraph before and after verses 12 & 13.

*8 For if Joshua had given them **rest**, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-**rest** for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's **rest** also **rests** from their works, just as God did from his. 11 **Let us**, therefore, make every effort to enter that **rest**, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.*

The topic that jumps out of vv. 8-11 is that of entering God's rest. To rephrase the question asked earlier, 'What prevents us from understanding Jesus' words?' As we look at Hebrews 4, I suggest the question, **"What enables us to enter God's Sabbath rest?"**

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

In verses 14 – 16, we are directed to contemplate the qualities of our 'great high priest' Jesus the Son of God. In Him we have the confidence to approach God's throne and receive mercy and grace in our time of need. Right now, we do not have the time to explore the full context alluded to in these verses which span from:

Genesis 2 ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

to:

Revelation 22 ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

This is just one of 34 times the throne of God is mentioned in Revelation. **the word of God...**

1. **is alive and active:** the Word of God has the vital power of life, and the power to bring life. Just as we have noted the connection between God speaking and the acts of creation, so we see the living Word, Jesus speaking and acts of healing, resurrection from the dead, expulsion of evil spirits, and control of natural forces occurs. So, to the written Word accomplishes God's purposes, preparing us to enter His rest.
2. **it penetrates and judges:** the sharpness of this dagger-like sword refers to its power to extend beyond the physical, *dividing joints and marrow*; having the power to *divide soul and spirit, thoughts and attitudes*. This instrument of death is repurposed to remove what brings death resulting in life. The word of God illuminates the corruption within, that must be removed and the corruption around us we are to avoid. The apostle Paul makes this point clear in both:

Colossians 3 ⁵ *Put to death (necropsy), therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:*

Romans 8 ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death (affect with necrosis) the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

3. **will judge all** (v.13)

- i. **Nothing** in all creation is hidden from God's sight.
- ii. **Everything** is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

In Colossians 3:5 Paul calls Christians to "put to death" aspects of our earthly nature (epi ths ghc) which are contrary to God's righteous standard. The Word of God, as a sharp sword penetrates our hearts and pinpoints that which must be "put to death" so we can live in life giving ways – see Colossians 3:11-17.

In I Samuel 31:4 we read that Saul *"fell on his own sword"* in battle. We might feel that the sword of God's Word penetrating our hearts is like an emotional suicide. But consider that God's Word is like a powerful scalpel which exposes error. And it is lifegiving – the truth does set us free – see John 8:31-32.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

It is essential that we define our enemy! We are to be on guard against the “schemes” or literally the “methods” (meqodeias) of Satan.

Looking at our second passage this morning, Ephesians 6, consider this observation: Matthew and Luke both record the temptation of Jesus by the devil which is the only example, I know of, that exhibits the instructions in this letter. What stands out is the brevity of Jesus’ responses. He spoke the fewest words necessary, he did not even acknowledge the devil.

So, against whom or what are we to wield the sword of the Word? Verse 12 tells about more about our foes within the heavenly realm:

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| • Rulers | arxas |
| • Authorities | exousias |
| • Cosmic powers | kosmokratora |
| • Spiritual forces of evil | pneumatika pohnrias |

Jesus set the pattern in His wilderness temptation. Remember how He wielded the sword of God’s Word against Satan’s attacks? He said, “it is written...” – see Matthew 4:4,7,10.

Conclusion

Robert C. Preus makes this comment, “The church fathers used to call the Scriptures *Deos loquam*, “God speaking.” Not merely something God has said, but rather *God speaking now*, mediating to you his Son, his Holy Spirit, his forgiveness, all the riches of His grace.” (62)

How can the Bible be so powerful? Because it is “inspired” or literally “God-breathed” – see II Timothy 3:16. So the question remains...if the Bible is a sword, are you learning to wield it?

- We are following a Bible reading plan – through the Bible in one year.
- What should you do if you fall behind in the reading plan? Just get back to it! Read to encounter the Lord, to receive His instruction and to be transformed by His power. Preferably write down your thoughts and observations. Pray for direction on how to apply what you learn. Look for recurring themes and seek out a community of those who desire to read and follow the Word.
- Among many great apps, please consider using You Version.
- Once logged in you can select Cornerstone as “my church”.