

THE WORD OF GOD IS ALIVE AND WELL ON PLANET EARTH

By

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Some of you will recognize that the title for today's message is a modified version from the title of a book from many years ago. A book by Hal Lindsey in 1972 entitled "Satan Is Alive and Well On Planet Earth".

I haven't read it. And, frankly, I have no particular desire to read it ... the blurb on the back was quite sufficient for me:

"In this book, Hal Lindsey ... outlines a battle plan for overcoming [our enemy, Satan]"

A battle plan, okay ... we'll get to some of that in a few minutes.

What I do want to speak about today is the Word of God itself. Now, since this is a topical message rather than an exposition of a particular passage of Scripture, I needed a passage for reference. And that's a very dangerous thing to be doing...

What?

Yes, that's a very dangerous thing to do. We need to understand two technical words right from the start: "Exegesis" and "Eisegesis".

1. EXEGESIS

- Literally means "To Lead Out"
- It means reading Scripture with the goal of taking out of it, in context, what God says and intends it to mean
- It draws us into agreeing with it as we submit to its author

2. EISEGESIS

- Literally means "To Lead Into"
- It means reading Scripture with an agenda
- It means reading into Scripture what we want and expect it to say
- It seeks to force Scripture to agree with us

And here I am with a topical message needing to find a text that supports it. In preparing for it, then, I really needed to be careful so that I didn't start using eisegesis when choosing my text. I actually spent quite a lot of time of this and the more I read and the more I thought about it, I realized I had only one real option. So here it is – the Bible! Have at it...

Unfortunately, we don't have several weeks to read it through, so I narrowed it down to two passages, one from Isaiah and one from Hebrews which really do fit the topic at hand.

Hear now the Word of God from the book of Isaiah, Chapter 55:

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-11

And from the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God. For the People of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let's have a word of prayer shall we? ...

Almighty God, to Whom all hearts are open,
All desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit
So that we may perfectly love You
And worthily magnify Your Holy Name
Through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

The last several months have been a time of extreme stress and burden for me, especially over the last few weeks with relief literally only coming last Monday. But I dare say if it wasn't for the read-through-the-bible-in-90-days venture that Pastor Matt led some of us through, I wouldn't have handled it nearly as well as I did.

I truly believe that that reading venture, together with the prayers of some of you, is what kept me sane. Some of you know what I'm talking about and I thank you profoundly for your support and prayers.

But there are times – are there not? – when we're going through the meatgrinder of life, when it's a crushing, heart-felt, palpable reality that "nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling".

It's all I have. It's all we have.

Not just knowing it in our heads and minds – but experientially with our hearts and emotions...

I had a conversation with my mother – my "Mum" – earlier this week. And as we talked, she reminded me of an event that happened when I was a young boy in England. My brother and I were out exploring the upper area of a rock quarry and he goaded me into sliding down the cliff on to a very narrow ledge, hundreds of feet above the quarry floor.

I couldn't get back up. I was facing outwards and was paralyzed in fear with no possible way of climbing up again.

We didn't have cell phones in those days, so my brother had to leave me all alone to go and get my Mum. Needless to say, she was horror-struck at what she saw across the quarry valley as she ran out to me.

And when she got to me, she couldn't reach me no matter how hard she tried. So she had to leave me plastered against the wall of the cliff in order to go and get the fire department.

I was left all alone a second time...

Finally, a fireman came and was able to grab hold of my hand and pull me up.

I don't know what ever possessed me to ever do something so utterly stupid, but I can tell you that to this day I'm absolutely terrified of heights.

God had me in His protective custody that day, I know that for sure...

But I can only imagine the horrific anguish that my Mum experienced – having to leave her firstborn on the face of a quarry cliff while she ran off to find a fireman!

You can just hear it, can't you:

... Oh, ***please, please*** God – don't let my boy fall and die!

I know some of you have had to deal with your own burdens recently, too, haven't you? The death of a husband ... the death of a mother ... the loss of a job ... so much more...weighty, weighty burdens. May God continue to bless you as you struggle through them.

Well, what does any of this have to do with the topic at hand, though? Actually, everything.

Because the Word of God IS alive and well on planet earth.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” ... 2 Timothy 3:16

Scripture is breathed out by God through human writers and done so for a reason; it's not a man-made concoction.

What I do want to do – and what I've been ruminating on for many weeks – is to look at three reasons WHY we need to be studying and come to know the Scriptures:

1. We are **commanded** to study and know the Word
2. We **need** to study and know the Word
3. We should **want** to study and know the Word

Now, by necessity, and for the sake of time, this will be somewhat of a birds-eye view, but we'll pause and look at some of the points a little more closely.

A. COMMANDED TO KNOW THE WORD

First of all, then, we are COMMANDED to study and know the Word of God. Think about it for just a moment. What is the first and greatest commandment?

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind” ... *Luke 10:27*

We are commanded to love the LORD our God with the ALL of our mind. That’s not a suggestion – it’s a component of the greatest of all commandments.

So how do we love God with all of our minds? Obviously, we need to know who He is. And the God-breathed Word is where we need to go to find out who He is.

Romans 12:2 says:

“BE transformed by the renewing of our minds”

And 2 Timothy 2:15 says:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, ***rightly handling the word of truth***”. ESV

Again, that’s not a suggestion.

And isn’t that precisely what the Bereans were doing in Acts 17? They didn’t just take Paul’s teaching at face value. They tested everything he said against the Scriptures every day to see if what he was saying was indeed true ... and they were praised for doing so!

B. NEED TO STUDY / KNOW THE WORD

Secondly, we NEED to study the Word – and this is where I want to spend most of my remaining time ... we NEED to study the Word.

Especially today.

Doubtless there are more, but I want to give you just 5 reasons why ... and each point could easily be its own sermon – or indeed a book – so I apologize up front that some of this is necessarily limited:

1. We need to know who God is | We need to know who we are in God’s sight
2. We need to resist our own propensity for idolatry
3. We need to know and understand the Gospel
4. We need to be able to fight off Satan and his efforts to destroy us, and
5. We need to grow up in the faith

1. WE NEED TO KNOW GOD | WE NEED TO KNOW OURSELVES

First, then – we need to **know** God and we need to know **who we are** in His sight.

Indeed:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One IS understanding” ... Proverbs 9:10

The Bible tells us that God is Holy; that He is Sovereign over all of creation; that He is Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent; that He is Perfect; that He is Infinite and Eternal; that He is Good, Just, and Righteous; and that He is a Loving and Gracious God to rebellious creatures.

We could literally spend the rest of our lives studying these things and never plumb their depth.

Of the Word itself, the Bible says:

- The Word of God is flawless (Proverbs 30:5) (2 Samuel 22:31) (Psalm 12:6)
- The LORD speaks the truth (Isaiah 45:15)
- The Word of God is eternal (Psalm 119:89)
- The Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12)
- The Word is Truth (John 17:17) (Psalm 199:160)

Of Jesus Christ, the Bible says:

- He is the Way, The Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
- He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)
- He is sinless in His humanity (Hebrews 4:15)
- He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)
- In Him, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (Colossians 2:9)

Studying the Word is not just how we come to know **about** God, but how we come to truly **KNOW** Him. Studying the Word is the very means by which our minds are renewed, and our lives transformed, as God – by His Holy Spirit – actively accomplishes what He desires in us, not allowing His Word to return to Him empty.

However, we are sinful beings and when we starve ourselves of the bread of life, we put ourselves in grave danger. And I’m not just being hyperbolic, either.

Let’s be honest with ourselves.

In your private space right now – just between you and God – do you regularly read your Bible? Are you involved in a disciplined bible study? Or do you neglect more often than not? Or dare I ask: when was the last time you even cracked open your Bible?

Hosea 4:6 says: “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge”.

That’s not ignorance in general. No! It means a lack of knowledge about God in particular and that lack of knowledge is extremely dangerous.

Because our basic human nature is sinful. At our core, we are sinful people. I know many people deny that, preferring instead to believe that all people are “basically good”.

Well, sorry – wrong! Read your bible. Seriously!

Each and every one of us is born with a sinful nature and therefore we act out that nature by sinning. And in that sinful state:

... we suppress the truth about God ... Romans 1:18

... we trade in the truth of God for a lie ... Romans 1:25

Read Romans 1:18-32 for yourself. The description of humanity's moral insanity at the end of that chapter is really depressing. Same thing in 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

*** Romans 1:29-31 ***

And all we need to do to validate it is look outside or watch the evening "news". The depravity of the human race is an in-your-face reality today, isn't it?

But this is nothing new: Habakkuk was sick of it in his day, too, and demanded an explanation from God. And what was God's response? Be patient, Habakkuk – judgment day is coming! And it did with the Babylonian Captivity.

But the final Day of the Lord is still coming...

We need to ask, though: WHY do we neglect His Word?

It's really very simple, isn't it?

"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". ... Hebrews 4:12

It judges us, and we know it. Bottom line – we like our sin, and so we avoid it.

Fortunately, our God is slow to anger and abounding in love. He calls out to us over and over and over again to return to Him, to turn from our sin and embrace Him before it really is too late.

We'll come back to that again in a minute...

2. TO RESIST IDOLATRY!

The second reason we NEED to study/know the Word is so we can draw on God's strength to resist our inherent idolatrous nature.

Every one of us engages in idolatry to one degree or another.

Think about it...

We've all eaten at a smorgasbord or buffet style restaurant at one time or another. Walking the food aisles with our plates, picking and choosing the foods we want and passing on the ones we don't.

We do the same thing with God and His Word:

- God’s love ... sure, a nice big helping of that;
- God’s omniscience ... sure, a dollop of this;
- God’s graciousness ... yep, a double helping of that;
- God’s kindness ... well, duh!
- God’s wrath ... er, no! Eww!
- God’s sovereignty ... sure, but not over my free will, so keep the gravy;
- God’s holiness ... fine, just a sprinkling to season things a bit, though;
- God’s electing a people for himself ... whoa! Allergy alert!!

We do that, folks!

And what we walk away with is an idol – a god we’ve constructed; our imagined idea of who we want Him to be, stripping God of the attributes we don’t like and doubling up on those we do.

The only way to resist it and rid ourselves of it is to read the Scriptures regularly and deeply. And as we do that, our LORD reaches deep inside us to accomplish what He desires, transforming us from the inside out, to reshape our vision of Him:

“...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” ...
Isaiah 55:11

3. TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL!

The third reason we NEED to study/know the Word is so we can preach the gospel to ourselves as we fight against our own sinfulness and idolatry.

Jesus said:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”
...Matthew 11:28

Come to the fountain of grace and drink deeply! But it’s not cheap grace ... no, not at all!

How often do we repeat this phrase?

“God is good _____, and all the time _____”.

Yes, God IS good. But that is precisely our problem!

As Judge of all the earth, He is a Good Judge ... A Righteous Judge ... A Perfectly Righteous Good Judge ... Who cannot dismiss or ignore sin and remain just. Only a corrupt judge allows evil and wickedness to go unpunished.

If we were to stand before the Perfectly Righteous Good Judge as the sinners we are, we would experience – first-hand – exactly what Jesus experienced on the cross. Not the nails, but the unadulterated, pure, righteous, indignant, wrath of God. The just punishment for a rebellious sinner who wants nothing to do with the Almighty.

It's a terrifying thought. But it is what the Bible clearly and unambiguously tells us.

In His humanity, Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life (Hebrews 4:15) and stood righteous before a Holy God. But on the cross, He willingly took upon Himself our sin and exposed Himself to the Righteous Wrath of Almighty God so that we don't have to. And He then gives us His sinless, perfect righteousness so we can stand before the Good Judge and be welcomed into heaven.

Justification by Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Word of God alone, and all for sake of the Glory of God alone! Hallelujah and Amen!

We either stand before God in our own "I'm basically good" righteousness – which is as a filthy rag in His sight (Isaiah 64:6), or we give Christ our sin and stand before God wearing the cloak of Christ's perfect righteousness. It's one or the other.

So let me ask you ... in what do you trust to get you past the bar of God's justice? In your own "I'm basically good" filthy rags or in the cloak of Christ's righteousness?

Grace is not cheap – it cost Jesus Christ His life! - but it is free to us. If you have never really repented of your sins, have never given them to Christ and received His perfect righteousness, then in the Name of Christ – do it now!

God is saying through Isaiah again today:

“Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live” ... Isaiah 55:3

I have to tell you ... when I'm in the valley of the shadow of death – in the meat-grinder of life – in the dark place of the soul – THIS is what keeps me going. Not some trite platitude.

But THIS!

And sometimes it's all I have ... NOTHING in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling!

If God loves me this much ... that Christ was willing to lay His life down for me ... I **know** He won't let me go ... I **know** He won't abandon me ... I **know** He will sustain and provide for me.

THIS ... it's the foundation for Romans, chapter 8!

... There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1)

... When we have no words with which to pray – the Spirit intercedes for us (Rom 8:26)

... In ALL things, God works for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28)

... If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31)

[Pause]

Now, as Christians, we still sin, but all we need to do now to be restored in our faith is to confess our sins to Him and He is faithful and just to forgive us from ALL unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Oh, what a gracious, gracious God we have! Don't we?

Okay, just a couple more points and we'll be done...

4. TO FIGHT OFF SATAN AND HIS EFFORTS TO DESTROY US!

The fourth reason we need to study/know the Word is so we can draw strength from God to fight against Satan's schemes to destroy us.

Just in seeing his names, we understand our enemy:

1. "The Accuser" (Job 1-2) (Zechariah 3:1)
2. "The Liar" (John 8:44)
3. "The Deceiver" (Rev 12:9)
4. "The Serpent" (Gen 3) (Rev 12:9) (Rev 20:2)
5. "The Tempter" (Mat 4:3)
6. "The Evil One" (Mat 6:13) (Mat 13:19) (Eph 6:16)
7. "The Prince of Darkness | The Prince of This World" (John 12:31)
8. "The Devil" (Luke 4:1-13) (1 John 3:8)
9. "A Roaring Lion" (2 Peter 5:8)

Satan and his demons ARE out to destroy us, but God has given us everything we need to combat them. The biblical battle plan is simple, so I'm only going to mention it in passing, but it is something we absolutely do need to study:

- Know your enemy ... (2 Peter 5:8)
- Put on the full armor of God ... (Ephesians 6:10-18)
(Remembering that the Word of God and Prayer are the only offensive weapons given to us by God!)
- Forgive one another often so Satan won't outwit us ... (2 Corinthians 2:11)
(Indeed, an unforgiving spirit does nothing but provide Satan an easy foothold in our lives)
- Resist the devil by standing firm in the faith and He will flee from us ... (2 Peter 5:9) (James 4:7)

Remember, Jesus used the Word of God to combat Satan in His wilderness temptations:

... "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" ...
Matthew 4:4

5. TO BE WELL NOURISHED SO WE CAN GROW UP!

The fifth reason we need to study/know the Word is to grow up in the faith.

Again, there is much to say about this, but for now – just like a cow chewing its cud to break down the grass in order to get all the nutrients out of it – we need to be in the Word chewing it over again and again and again so we can nourish ourselves by it.

And as we grow up, we produce fruit – good works – and that shows itself in our loving our neighbor as ourselves, thereby fulfilling the second greatest commandment.

But it does take work! It's not easy to love people, is it? ... especially our enemies!

- Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose ... (Philippians 2:12-13)
- Train yourself to be godly ... (1 Timothy 4:7)
- Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. ... (1 Timothy 6:11-12)
- Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them ... (1 Timothy 4:16)
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another ... (Colossians 3:16)

SO much more could be said on this, couldn't it?

We need to read the Word regularly and diligently to be nourished so we can grow up in the faith!

C. WE SHOULD WANT TO STUDY / KNOW THE WORD

Finally, then, the child of God should WANT to study the Word. It's an enormous blessing and privilege!

Jesus said:

"If you love me, you will obey me" ... (John 14:15)

And the child of God wants to be obedient and wants to please God:

... "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." ...Psalm 119:11

... "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" ... Psalm 119:97

... "Blessed is he whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night." ... Psalm 1:2

The blessing is real!

God Himself IS our very great reward (Genesis 15:1).

CONCLUSION

Studying and knowing the Word, then, is a commandment of God; it's a serious need of our souls; and, it's truly a blessing beyond words.

Because the Word of God IS alive and well on planet earth.

May God stir within each one of an ever-growing desire for Him.

Amen.