

Title: Lettuce – pt.2
Text: Hebrews 4.11-13
Theme: The seriousness of entering his rest
Series: Hebrews pt.9
Prop Stmt God’s Word is the means that reveals the true condition of our soul.

This morning, before I read our text, I want to give you some context. I want you to understand the weight of what we are about to examine in light of God’s history of revelation and in light of the argument and point of the book of Hebrews. I pray that your attention is grabbed and your heart is gripped by the significance of this text and the reason why this text is so often quoted. After a brief summary of the reality and affect of God’s voice in history

When God speaks, life happens. When God speaks angels are birthed, history starts, words are spoken, worship begins, matter is formed, worlds come into being, stars explode with light, galaxies begin to spin, planets orbit, ocean tides flow, mountains announce their presence, fish dance in streams, birds soar in skies, worms play in dirt, trees stand to attention, hearts beat in rhythm, brain waves awaken, humans inhale, eyes are opened, music is made and joy is spread. When God speaks, truth is made known, mysteries are revealed, law and logic is established and reason and reasoning – is. When God speaks, categories are created. Right and wrong, truth and error, reward and punishment are set in place. When God speaks, his heart is revealed and his authority is established. Forever, his fixed, final, eternal, unbreakable, unshakeable, unquestionable, unchangeable, unalterable, unmovable, undeniable, unmistakable, unassailable, irrefutable, indisputable, indubitable, incontrovertible, impeccable, infinite, inerrant and all-sufficient word is settled in heaven. When God speaks human words are rendered irrelevant and we are left with no excuses, and there are no exceptions and there is no escape. Therefore, when God speaks, there is light, his children sing, fools are silenced and darkness flees.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Since, “long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” and since he has spoken “therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? And since, “the promise of entering his rest still stands.” (will you now stand with me?)

Read Text

Here is the big idea: God's Word is the means that reveals the true condition of our soul. Three times in these two chapters (3-4) the AH says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." The reason he is so concerned about our response to God's word is because of the very essence, affect and result of God's Word. Those three categories are captured in this text. The essence of God's Word is that it is dynamic. The affect of God's Word is deeply effective and the result of God's Word is that it is pervasive in all of life. Let's look at them one at a time.

1. God's Word is Dynamic (12a)

"For the Word of God is living and active." These first two words describe God's Word as a dynamic that cannot be contained. That it is cannot be controlled, limited, hidden or denied. It is living and active. What does he mean by living?

A. Living

Who of us is not awed in our study of the origin of a human life? Yes, we learn early on the biological reality of the event in a science class or in a more sophisticated university course. But, even though you may be well versed in the actual science of it all, there is a mystery, a deep pondering, a holy-like trance that comes upon you as you watch it take place. You may be an Ob-gyn doctor, living in a world of conception, formation, labor and delivery, but when you or your spouse becomes pregnant, it is not just science, it is exhilarating. The formation of life is literally awe-some! It is known, yet imponderable. God's Word has always been the source of life. He spoke and the universe came into existence. He breathed into Adam and Adam became a living being. He breathed out through his servants and they wrote His Word, which has been preserved to this day. So, yes, God's Word is the source of life, but "source" is not the major emphasis that is here in v. 12. That aspect is here and is apparent, but the word, translated "living" really has idea of being dynamic and powerful so as to effectively be able to examine, discern and judge. It is also the first word in the original text, of v.12, meaning that it stands in an emphatic and prominent position.

B. Active

It is powerful and it is active, that it is, the Word of God instead of lying dormant, is always powerfully working God's purposes which, as we see is to expose, and heal or expose and judge if necessary.

Tokichi Ichii was hanged for murder in Tokyo in 1918. He was a cruel and hard man whose life as a criminal brought him repeated punishments that only layered his calloused soul. For his crimes he was resolute in his refusal to ever say he was sorry until one day, just before his sentencing, he received a NT by Miss West and Miss McDonald, two missionaries. After he was visited by Miss West, "he began to read the story of Jesus' trial and execution. His attention was riveted by the sentence, "And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" This sentence transformed his life. [he said] "I stopped: I was stabbed to the heart, as if by a five-inch nail. What did the

verse reveal to me? Shall I call it the love of the heart of Christ? Shall I call it His compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that with an unspeakably grateful heart I believed.” Tokichi was sentenced to death and accepted the verdict as being the fair and impartial judgment of God. In the days before his death he wrote, “People will say that I must have a very sorrowful heart because I am daily awaiting the execution of the death sentence. This is not the case. I feel neither sorrow nor distress nor any pain. Locked up in a prison cell six feet by nine in size I am infinitely happier than I was in the days of my sinning when I did not know God.”¹ Since God’s Word is the most powerful dynamic you will ever encounter, the reward of acceptance and the consequences of rejection is huge.

2. God’s Word is Effective. (12b)

A. It is Sharper

This phrase, “sharper than any two-edged sword” speaks to the effectiveness of the Scriptures. Since a double-edged sword was the sharpest device known in the NT world, the idea of this phrase is that it is sharper than the sharpest sword. A sword is a frequent description of the Word of God – (Eph 6.17; Rev. 1.16; 2.12; Rev.19.15). But this sword does not more than cut, it is like a surgeon’s knife that opens us to healing grace.

A razor blade is about 9 thousandths of an inch thick. But an obsidian blade (sharpest blade made to date), which has a cutting edge that is measurably sharper than high-quality surgical scalpels, is only 3 nanometers thick. A nanometer is 1 billionth of a meter. If I am doing the math correctly, that means that an obsidian blade is 750 times sharper than a razor blade. But even an obsidian blade cannot cut what God’s Word does.

B. It is Piercing

There are three couplets: soul and spirit; joints and marrow; thoughts and intents. Soul and spirit speaks of the non-physical, the immaterial power that energizes a person. Joints and marrow speaks of the material aspects of one’s body. And thought and intents of the heart deals with the very source of idea formulation, concept consideration, desire and will. When you put all of this together, it means that God’s Word is able to so effectively penetrate and pierce the deepest parts of our being that it can probe the recesses of our heart and bring to the surface hidden sin. It can find and deal with the most personal aspects of our being. On the one hand, to have the very guts of your soul found is intimidating. Most of the time we don’t even want to know the truth about ourselves. But God wants us to know it and face it because Christ did not come to offer us a life of ceremony and tradition that contents itself with external practices, but is void of internal reality. I resent how religions based on ceremonies and formalities rob people of life! God made us, not to simply exist, but to live. God’s Word goes deep inside of us because that is where our thoughts are formed, our motives are sourced, and our real person resides. That is your true essence and God knows you that deep. That means that authentic Christianity and “real church” is not the repetition of ceremonies and the going

¹ Cited in *Desiring God*, pp.120-121

through with the motions. True Christianity affects us deeply at the heart level and because of that it affects all aspects of our lives.

C. It is Discerning

Have you heard the “cyber-knife” cancer treatment technology being advertised? Cyber-knife is actually not a knife at all. It is a form of radio-surgery. What is more, radio-surgery is not even surgery, but is a form of radiation therapy. It is called radio-surgery because it is so precise, like surgery. Cyber-knife technology is to chemotherapy what a drone missile is to a nuclear warhead. Let’s say for example that you have cancer in your kidney. You can take chemotherapy, which is like setting of a nuclear bomb in your system. Your hope is that the cancer dies before you do. Traditional radiation attempts to limit the damage to your body by focusing treatment more on the area of where the cancer is, but it still burns and destroys good tissue in the area. But cyber-knife treatment is so precise that it is able to deliver enormously high doses of radiation to tumors while keeping the exposure to surrounding normal tissues very low, which allows the patient to receive much more radiation than before, which often does such a good job of destroying the tumor that its effect is like having it surgically removed. That is what God’s Word does! It goes deep, it discerns what is wrong. It focuses on what is evil and deals with it. Most people are not willing to have soul surgery like that and therefore, so many churches are not willing to preach the word. It’s not that it doesn’t work; it’s that, it does, the world does not like it. And if we want the world to like us, then the Word becomes an embarrassment and we, unlike Paul become ashamed of the gospel. When prominence is not given to the reading and the praying and the singing and the preaching of the Word, then the gospel is marginalized, Christ is trivialized and God is rendered obsolete. There is a glaring absence of the awe and wonder of God in our churches that is directly related to the absence of authoritative, expositional preaching. Looking long and hard into the Scriptures means that we bring our hearts before the long and deep look of God. While that is humbling and hard, that is where our weakness is met with his mercy, and our sin is met with his grace. Joy springs from knowing that in my deepest sin, the radiation of the gospel blows it up and credits me with the righteousness of Christ. As a cancer patient, the oncologist or surgeon may shake his head and say, “I’m sorry, you are not a candidate for the cyber-knife.” However, as a sinner, you are the ideal patient for the Word of God. There is no need, no sin, no sorrow that his word cannot reach, expose and to that need pump in immeasurable amounts of his grace.

When the Word is neglected in church and subsequently in our lives, then we end up living shallow, unexamined, dull lives. That is so easy anyway since we are so busy that we hardly have time for thought and depth anyway. Is it not odd that with all of our technologies for saving time and saving work, we seem to be more hectic, frantic, and hurried than ever? You have microwaves, cell phones and email and yet how many of you have a “to do” list that is haunting you right now? We have to run so hard, just to keep from getting behind, we never seem to get caught up. So when the urgent things of life take the bulk of our attention, it is the important things that end up being neglected. Life today tends to be so hollow. We need help discerning the difference between the trivia and the important.

Since God's Word is so effective at examining our hearts, it is hard to sit under its exposure; However, the result of not only seeing our sin, but then seeing and experiencing his gospel is so satisfying, that all risk of exposure is overwhelmed with joy. Therefore, while the risk of being examined by the Scriptures, may seem hard on the soul, in truth, living an unexamined life is not blissful ignorance, it is damnable arrogance.

3. God's Word is Pervasive. (13)

A. The range of the Scriptures is universal

The result is first described negatively. – no creature is hidden.

That is a devastating concept if you think that you can hide from God and that you are the exception to his law. You cannot escape his penetrating gaze. He knows all things. This is more than he knows your actions, which is intimidating enough, he knows your thoughts. The idea of your thoughts being made known is extremely frightening. To be found by his Word, to be exposed by his Word, is the same thing as being known, exposed and revealed by God.

It is then described positively. We are uncovered and laid bare before God. It is certainly distressing to be physically bare, but so much more intimidating is to have your very soul laid open before God. The idea of this phrase goes beyond mere exposure to that of vulnerability and helplessness. The Word of God reveals that we have no means by which to rescue ourselves from the plight of our own sin. God's Word reveals our abject need of a Savior. Then, God's Word points us to Christ!

B. The verdict of the Scriptures is undeniable

Can you imagine the level of despair if this verse (13) were the only truth that we knew about God? The very reason why God is hated so much is because he really is a know-it-all and what is worse, is that this devastatingly, exhaustive, personal knowledge is known by the one to whom we must give an account. There is no getting around it. God has perfect knowledge. It is not acquired knowledge. It is a perfect, eternally present knowledge of all things, past, present and future, even acts, decisions and consequences of what appear to us to be the free choices of people. He knows it all. The point is clear. The word will be for you a word of judgment or word of promise. God does not leave us cut opened and bleeding under judgment and condemnation. Yes, he exposes us to the reality of our need but then, when we finally see how hopeless we are to fix ourselves, he points us to Christ.

Conclusion

The author of Hebrews unloads this incredibly important truth because of the serious nature of the issue that he is dealing with. How do I know if I am a genuine follower of Christ? How do I know if I am in Christ? That answer is going to be revealed to you by being exposed to the Word of God. If you are not a believer, then intentional exposure to the Word will either fill you with anger or with repentance. If you are not a believer, you will resist the light. You will resent exposure, and fight against soul-searching. If this marks your life, then friend, cry out to God for grace and mercy. If after this much time of being exposed to the gospel, you still do not believe, you are in danger of missing the harbor. If you are a genuine believer, but you are plagued by doubts and fears, then intentional, ongoing exposure will help you see the evidences of genuine faith. Even in the midst of your struggle, his voice will be heard, speaking grace to your need. If the Word is at work in you, then in your desires, affections and habits, love, trust and perseverance will be seen and in your heart of hearts, there will be a resting of soul.