

Sermon Series - Draw Near to God
Sermon Title and Text - Draw Near to God through the Word: Hebrews 4:11-13

Sermon Points:

Introduction: How Well Do You Know Yourself?

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The Particular Gift of a Word-Saturated Family (3:13)

Lord, we can have such hard and unbelieving hearts. We want to see and savor Jesus more than anything in this world. So, thank you Lord for your word that is alive and that pierces to our innermost being and reveals what's there. Lord, help us come to your word and respond to your word together as a blood-bought family to hold fast to Jesus.

Introduction: How Well Do You Know Yourself?

How many of us think we have a pretty good idea of what's going on in our own hearts? How many of us want to be happier in Jesus in 2018? How many of us spend at least 20 minutes a day watching TV (news, shows, movies), checking social media, or with some form of entertainment? How many of us live our lives out in the world or in our homes where sin and brokenness abounds every day? How many of us sit down and read our Bibles at least 20 minutes every day (podcasts and random sermons don't count)? What about prayer?

Now, that entertainment might not be horrible or evil on its own. And I'm not saying you should leave the world and go and be a monk somewhere. But, I am saying that we all have more influences on our hearts than we'd like to admit and we all neglect the Bible and prayer, our ways to draw near to God, than we'd like to admit.

Now, I almost preached from the book of Jeremiah because it shows in such great, tragic form what happens when a people begins to be influenced by the culture around them and neglects the word of the God who saved them.

The people of God have turned from the God who saved them in every way you could think. In Jeremiah 1:9 God gives Jeremiah clear commands to simply speak the words that God commands him to speak.

In 2:4 the call to the people of God is to "Hear the Word of the Lord." In 2:8 it says the problem with Israel is that their leaders, their shepherds and their priests have turned away from the word of the Lord and have led the people away as well.

And the hope comes throughout the book in promises like 3:15 where God says if the people will repent and turn to him, God will give them shepherds who will feed them his word. In 11:8 it says the problem is that the people would not listen to God's word because of stubborn hearts. In 13:10 it says the people refuse to hear his words and follow their heart instead. And finally this all culminates in 17:9 when it says that human hearts are desperately wicked so that we cannot even know the wickedness that lies within them.

The message of Jeremiah couldn't be more stunningly clear: If we ignore or neglect the word of the Lord we will certainly and subtly drift toward what is worthless instead of following after him because our hearts are so wicked that we don't even see ourselves drifting without his word.

In other words, you don't know yourself unless you're in the word. You don't know where unbelief is creeping in unless you're hearing the words of the Lord. You can't trust your own thoughts or your own motivations.

Our Need: Hold Fast to Jesus (v.11)

So, what might surprise you is that though our context is different, our need is similar to the people in Jeremiah. Listen to verse 11:

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Chapters 3-4 are mainly about how we can enter that rest. Verse 11 is the culmination of those chapters and it is calling us to strive to enter and not fall by disobedience like Israel did. So, we need to ask ourselves: What defines their disobedience?

Let's look at it positively and negatively. All the way back in 3:6 the author of Hebrews calls them to "hold to their hope," after showing them their hope is Jesus. So, we can see positively that our call is to hold fast to Jesus. Or, we could say, keep trusting Jesus moment by moment in the trials and temptations of life.

In 4:3 it says that the way we enter rest now and forever in Jesus is through "belief" or *faith*. So, clearly the author is calling all of us to trust Jesus, to hold fast to him.

Then, negatively we see in 3:7-11 that the people couldn't hear the words of God because they hardened their hearts. And in 3:12 is a warning to not have an evil, *unbelieving* heart so that they fall away from God. And finally, listen to 3:18-19:

And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

So, their disobedience was because of unbelief. The voice of God was ignored, their hearts were hardened, and unbelief in God's promises followed. That's the negative warning. The big problem in Hebrews 3-4 is unbelieving hearts. Remember those deceitful hearts from Jeremiah? Same message here.

And remember, the positive call in Hebrews 3-4 is, "hold fast to, hear the word about, and believe in Jesus as your only hope" for rest today and tomorrow.

In other words, when the author of Hebrews says, "let us strive to enter so that we don't disobey like Israel," I think what he's saying, is ***"Let us hear the word of God that will soften our hearts to God and help us hold fast to Jesus in the midst of the trials of life."***

Our great need, day in and day out, is to hold fast to Jesus and we do that by hearing the word of God.

So, I could stop here and simply plead with you to open your Bible every day and hear from God. I hope you see what is at stake according to the author of Hebrews. We need to hear the word and hold fast to Jesus to confirm that we've truly believed and to continue holding fast to Jesus.

This is not Dave's opinion. This is the clear message of this author to these Christians. And it's a loving warning to call them back to the word of God and therefore to cling by faith to more joyful, more powerful hope in Jesus.

God's Word: What It Is (v.12)

Now, if you've heard the message of Hebrews and Jeremiah clearly, the amazing thing is that what changes everything is the word of God. And today in verse 12, what follows the call to strive to enter and avoid unbelief is a beautiful picture of what the word is and what it does.

Now, my prayer today is simply that you'd marvel at this and believe this and that the Spirit would create wonder at the word of God that would lead you to give it more priority in your life this coming year. So, first, what is the word of God? What characteristics make it unique? Look at the first half of verse 12:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

First, it is the word **of God**. It's not simply about God so that we know facts. It's the very words from his mouth, inspired to be written down by his Spirit, to ultimately point to his Son.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is "breathed out by God." Deuteronomy 8:3 is quoted by Jesus when he says that we should not live by bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God. Do you worry more about your next meal to sustain you or more about the words from the mouth of God, the very breath of God, to sustain you?

2 Peter 1:21 says that no Scripture comes from man alone, but that men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. In other words, these words are the very breath of God, written down by the power and inspiration of the Spirit of God.

And finally, in John 5:39, Jesus speaking to the religious leaders says, "You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about me."

The word of God is the very breath of God, written down by the Spirit of God, to magnify our hope and our joy in the Son of God. In every way, this is the word **of the living God of the universe**.

And because this book is the very breath of the living God, this book is living itself. In other words, when you read your Bible in the morning, you are reading something alive. This is not something dead or old or crusty. This is not something that needs your help to make it relevant. This book is breathing on you as you breathe. This book is warming your heart to God while you drink your warm coffee. This book is making dead parts of your heart alive to God, because it is alive to point to Jesus by the Spirit who wrote it. 1 Peter 1:23 says the word of the Lord is living and enduring and will never fade.

And because this book is alive it is "active" or a better word would be, "effective." Isaiah 55:10-11 says that when God's word goes out, it accomplishes all that God wants it to accomplish. In other words, as I get up to preach every Sunday, I am not wondering if God will do his work. I am pleading with God to please do the work of convicting and comforting by the Spirit, but I have completely confidence that these words will do the work because they are *his words* and they are *alive*.

This is why we are so committed to preaching right from the Bible here at Sojourners, not simply picking a topic and finding a verse or two that makes the point we want it to make. We want to submit to the Bible, not the other way. We want to conform to the Bible, not have it conform to us. We believe if the Holy Spirit wrote the very breath of God down for us and it is alive, that we ought to give our lives to get this meaning right in the context he saw fit to write it, and that if we do, the text will be relevant to change you because it is God's breath and God is always relevant. So, why do we agonize over every sentence? Because these are the very word of our God!

And finally, this word *of God, that is alive and effective, is sharp*. This word is sharper than any double-edged sword. This word, Ephesians 6:17 says, is the sword of the Spirit. In other words, if everything that happens in the believers life today happens in the power of the Spirit, which I believe is true, the main weapon of the Spirit is the word of God. The Spirit wrote the word. And now the Spirit wields the word as the weapon to help us fight sin and trust God. The Spirit does the work by wielding the word.

This is an incredible book. The very words of God, written down by the Spirit, to point to the supremacy of Jesus and to help us hold fast and believe in Jesus so that we don't fall in unbelief. And this book is able to do this because it is alive, effective, and sharp as a weapon in the hands of the Spirit.

God's Word: What It Does (v.12)

So, because of what God's word is, certainly we can trust the promises of what the author says it will do. Look at the second half of verse 12:

Piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

First, it pierces us deeply. Notice, that because it is sharp it can go deep. It can get past the hard shell of bone and go all the way to the joints and the marrow. It gets deep. It gets all the way to the deepest place of our thoughts, feelings, motivations, and intentions. It gets to our souls and our spirits. That's the picture here: The word of God as the sharp sword of the Spirit piercing past the surface level.

Now, if you remember Jeremiah and Israel, this is good news! Our problem in unbelief is hard, stubborn hearts. But, if we will hear the words of God, he can pierce past the hardness. He can pierce past our self-protecting, self-sufficient, self-promoting, self-pretending, best-self forward, social media, Instagram-perfect shells.

Most of us will not admit our failure and fickle faith and foolishness to other people because we have not even REALLY admitted it to ourselves. Either we love our sin too much or it feels too painful to hear the word of God get beyond that hard layer and see our own brokenness. I wonder how many of us, without knowing it, avoid the word of God because we know how deep it goes if we really go there.

And, let's be clear, the word of God does not just go to the point where we admit we have problems: I'm not a good parent, I'm not a good husband, I'm not good with my money, etc. It goes deeper. It says that as we read this living word of God and the Spirit pierces down to our souls, it actually can discern our thoughts and intentions.

In other words, the word will not just reveal the fruit, that is bad things you do, but it will reveal the root, that is the roots of unbelief in your heart. It will reveal every sinful motivation. It will reveal every sinful thought and intention.

As you read this book it reads you. As you open this book it opens you. As you pursue this book it pursues you. When was the last time you were pierced by the word like this?

This book is dangerous. It is dangerous to our self-sufficiency. It is dangerous to our ideas that we're not really that bad. It is dangerous to our quick-fixes in family and marriage and life and relationships because it reveals we have a heart problem. It is dangerous to our idols. It is dangerous to our comfortable lives. It is dangerous to our holding parts of our time and money and lives selfishly and not laying it all at the foot of the cross. And because of that, which is the best news for us, it is dangerous to our unbelief that stem from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

This word of God, living, effective, and sharp, will pierce to deepest parts of us and reveal our idolatrous thoughts and intentions and show us where we have trusted other things than Jesus for our joy and our hope and our comfort, perhaps for years. It will ruin our self-trust and it will ruin our unbelief in Jesus as we realize we are totally deficient apart from his all-sufficient grace that was purchased on the cross.

As this word pierces and reveals unbelief it will always heal and point to our Redeemer. The Scriptures are about him in every way.

Applications:

The Peculiar Gift of Being Laid Bare (4:13)

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

This is how we always are in front of God. You are naked in front of him right now. I am naked right now. He knows it all. Every thought. Every intention. Whether we hear God's word and hope in Jesus or not, we are always naked and laid bare in the presence of the holy God.

So, why do I say this is a gift when God's word does this to us? Because when we hear God's word and it pierces us, we see reality. We see ourselves how God sees us. We see the brokenness and the fear and the unbelief at their most raw points. We see the sin in its most deep and heinous root. But, God's word that pierces us will also heal us.

It will also remind us that if we cannot trust ourselves there is One we can trust. As we see the seriousness of sin, it will remind us of the sweetness of our Savior. It will reveal our sin and show us that Jesus is all we can cling to and that he is always enough.

The word is effective and for those in Christ, as it pierces to reveal the depths of our soul, as it pierces to the deep, painful spots, it will also pour gentle, soothing gospel balm on the wound and lead us to deep dependence in light of our depravity and deeper faith in light of our futility.

I am praying that God would lay us all bare by his word this year and we would feel the reality of our nakedness before God, so that God can, through his word and by his Spirit clothe us again with fresh grace and help us to cling to Jesus more than anything else amidst all suffering and temptation. O, that God would lay us bare and sweetly break us and restore us in faith and fellowship with Jesus by his word this year.

The Particular Gift of a Word-Saturated Family (3:13)

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

So, we're reminded of the problem the author has presented, a lack of hearing the word that comes from hard, deceitful, sinful hearts.

But, notice the solution here: exhort each other every day. Now, how are you going to exhort each other in a way that pierces through the hard hearts of your brothers and sisters here at Sojourners? You *must* know this word.

Listen, I'm not talking about the kind of exhortation that comes from those who like to throw theological categories at people's heads like weapons. I'm talking about people who have been laid bare before God by the living word, who have been humbled before God themselves, and who plead with others face to face, not on Facebook, to turn from sin to Jesus. I'm talking about bold humility. I'm talking about people who feel the gravity of the word that pierces and the gladness of the word that pierces to help us turn to Jesus.

I'm talking about people not saturated with podcasts and books and categories, but saturated with the very words of God. I'm talking about people of this book, of the words of God, living, effective, sharp, piercing, discerning.

How can we even feel comfortable offering counsel to someone if we've never been laid bare ourselves by saturation in the word of God? How can we even trust our own heart and thoughts??

Now there are two implications from this text: If we don't know each other and we don't know God through his word, we will not be able to help each other in this God-appointed way.

So when you open your Bibles in the morning, you are not just doing it for you, though I pray the word pierces you. You are doing it for this family. You are doing it to point each other to Jesus.

And I believe if we will give ourselves individually and corporately to this living, effective, sharp, piercing, discerning word of God this year, God will be pleased to lay us bare and show us our sin, so that he can heal us from our sin by deeper faith in Jesus as the ultimate treasure of our souls and ultimate joy of our lives. This book is dangerous to our comfortable lives and assumptions. But, we can't afford not to be laid bare and have our idols die and our faith in Christ rise.