

“The Power of God’s Word”

Heb. 4:12-13

- INTRO. - ILL. – In the days of George Whitefield, there was a young man named John Thorpe. He was part of a group of atheists called “The Hell Fire Club.” One of the things they would do in their meetings was to mock well-known preachers, so Thorpe went to one of Whitefield’s meetings in order to learn his mannerisms (to be able to mock him in their next meeting).

In order to be able to mock him well, he had to listen very carefully to Whitefield’s message. He then went to the club’s meeting, and he stood up to mimic this great preacher. When he did, he opened a Bible, and his eyes fell on these words: “Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.”

He was so convicted by those words (and the preaching of Whitefield) that he cried out to God for mercy. He was gloriously converted to Christ (and never again had any thoughts of mocking the preaching of the Word of God).

- My friend, the Word of God is powerful! It is “...living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword...” It is the “sword of the Spirit” that is mighty in the hands of his preachers.
- The Bible (of course) is different from every other book. It is the divinely-inspired Word of God. It is

God Himself speaking – and when God speaks, it is always different from the words of men. And Heb. 4:12-13 is one of the most important texts in all of Scripture. Here we see the uniqueness of the Bible spelled out in unequivocal language.

- This morning we will be focusing on the power of the Word of God, and we will see this in four main divisions. First of all, we need to see:

I. THE CONNECTION TO GOD’S WORD

- A lot of people *know* v. 12, but we need to understand how it connects with the message of this chapter. We need to understand the context in which this verse is given.
- A couple of weeks ago, we ended with v. 11, which says, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest [the rest of God’s eternal salvation, which consists of a present reality and a future hope of heaven], lest anyone fall through *following* the same example of disobedience.”
- This is an urgent plea *not* to miss out of God’s salvation rest. And the author of Hebrews indicates that those who miss it, will be following an example of disobedience. We know what that is. It is the example of Israel in the wilderness.
- We saw in 3:19 that they were *not* able to enter into the Land of Promise because of their unbelief.

Their “disobedience” was that of “unbelief,” – they did *not* trust God. And in the same way, those who miss God’s salvation rest are those who will *not* put their faith in Christ.

- And the plea (here) is that we would *not* be like them, but that we would believe God. But there is a specific concept the author of Hebrews is building on (here), and we see it back in 4:2.
- *There* it says, “For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the **word** they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”
- What they failed to believe was the Word of God. It was the Word of God that they rebelled against and the Word of God they would *not* believe. It was called “good news” because it consisted of the promise of God to give them the land and to abundantly bless them there.
- But here (in Hebrews) it applies to the good news of the gospel – and this is very important, if we are going to see the connection between v. 11 and v. 12.
- Why do we need to be diligent to hear and believe God’s Word? Because it is living and active...etc. John Piper writes, “Verse 11 says in essence: Be sure that you know and trust the word of God referred to in verse 2 – the good news of God’s

promises and forgiveness. Then verse 12 says: Yes, and one reason to do this is because this word (the good news referred to in verse 2) is living and active, etc.”

- So in essence, our text this morning is an argument for *why* it is so important for us to be diligent to enter God’s salvation rest by hearing and believing God’s Word.
- And perhaps it would be good (at this point) to step back for a moment and get the bigger picture. You know sometimes (with expository preaching) we spend so much time on the details of the text that we often miss the bigger picture of the overall message.
- So let’s think back for a moment, and in this section of Hebrews we see four main pillars to the argument given by the author. First, he is saying that our highest priority in this life is to make sure we have entered into God’s salvation rest.
- We need to make sure we are saved from our sins, and that we have a firm assurance that we will spend eternity in the restful presence of God. And we should strive to take as many people as possible with us (which is why this author wrote this letter).
- Secondly, we need to understand that the only way to enter that salvation rest is by believing in Christ. Verse 3 says, “For we who have believed enter that

rest...” It is saving faith in Christ that is the key to entering His rest. We must put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ to save us.

- Thirdly, in order to believe, we have to *hear* God’s Word. We have to hear the good news. We have to hear the gospel. This is why v. 2 is so important: “For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also...”
- The ones this book was written to had heard the good news. They knew the gospel. They knew the truth about Christ and the salvation He came to bring.
- If they had never heard that message then they couldn’t believe, but because they knew it, they *could* believe. Paul wrote, “...faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17)
- He wrote, “How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14)
- You have to hear the message of the gospel in order to believe in Christ – and this is why we must be diligent to proclaim it. You can’t believe if you have *not* heard. This is what makes faith possible.

- The original audience for this book had all heard the good news of the gospel – but the plea (there) was to unite what they had heard with saving faith. They knew what they needed to do, they just needed to do it. They just needed to respond with genuine saving faith.
- Fourthly, there is a great urgency in this matter. You can’t afford to put it off. You must do it today! And this has been the “front burner issue” of Hebrews. In 2:1 it says, “...we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard...”
- In 4:3 it asks, “...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” In 3:1 it says, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.” In 3:15 it says, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”
- So *that* is the bigger picture, but in v. 12 he tells us *why* this is so important. In fact, we have to include v. 13 in that as well, because this shows us the great accountability to God in hearing and believing His Word.
- And we need to be reminded that the author of this book has already touched on the authority and power of God Word. In chapter 1 we saw where the revelation of the NT is the final and complete revelation of God to men.

- In chapter 2 he emphasized that we need to pay much closer attention to that revelation in Christ. In chapters 3-4 he tied the salvation rest of God to the word of the gospel. His constant use of the phrase “let us” introduced exhortations to respond in saving faith.
- And *now* (in 4:12) he clearly ties all this to the power and authority of the Word of God. The word “for” (at the beginning of this verse) connects the two together. So (moving into v. 12) we see:

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD’S WORD (v. 12a)

- Look with me at v. 12, “For the word of God...” (Stop right there.) We don’t have to guess about what he is addressing here. It is clearly the Word of God (known elsewhere in the NT as the Scriptures).
- The author of Hebrews indicates that this is God’s own word. It is a word that has (as its origin) God Himself. In fact, (back in 3:7) we see that Psalm 95 (which is part of the OT Scripture) was inspired by the HS of God.
- And what is true of that Psalm is true of *all* the Scriptures. The Word of God is inerrant and infallible because it is God-breathed. It is verbally inspired by the Spirit of God, and therefore every word of it is true.

- The Apostle Peter wrote, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
- There is no other book like the Bible! Only the Bible is the Holy Scripture. Only the Bible is the Word of God. Only the Bible is God’s revealed truth. That’s what makes this book different from every other book. And here the author of Hebrews gives us three characteristics of this divinely-inspired book. First of all, it is:

A. Living

- Look at v. 12 again, “For the word of God is living...” The word for “living” is “zao,” and it basically mean “alive.” It comes from the very same root where we get our English word “zoology.” That is the study of living things. And the fact that this is a present participle means that this book is characterized as being alive.
- Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, “If you cut it [the Bible] into a thousand pieces, every piece would live and grow.” It is *not* a dead word – it is a living word. Every part of it is living.

- What this means, is that the words in this book are *not* just words on the page. They are living words, and they have the power to *give* life.
- In fact, this book has the power to produce *eternal* life. We read in 1 Peter 1:23, "...for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and abiding word of God."
- The word for "abiding" means "enduring." God's Word is eternal. In Luke 21:33 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."
- The Apostle Peter quoted Is. 40, which says, "For, 'all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." (1 Peter 1:24-25)
- The Word of God is a living word and it is an eternal word. As the living Word of God, the Bible does *not* merely find static existence in the minds of those who study it – it literally comes to life in their hearts.
- You see, God's Word cannot be separated from God Himself. It cannot be separated from His power and authority. With a spoken word He created this

universe, and with His written Word He gives spiritual life to those who are His.

- And, by the way, this means that the Bible is never out of date. It means that the Bible is never irrelevant. It is eternally contemporary, and eternally alive.
- In fact, we are told in Scripture that His Word never returns to Him void, but always accomplishes what He desires. You know Is. 55:11 – "So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it." (Pause) In addition to being *living*, the Word of God is also:

B. Active

- Some translations have the word "powerful." This is a Greek word from which we get our English word "energy." It is the Word of God that energizes us spiritually.
- In Ps. 19:7 we are told that the Word of God has the power to convert the soul. It has the power to bring life where there is spiritual death. In Ps. 119:50 we are told that it has the power to comfort in times of affliction.
- In John 8:32 Jesus said His Word has the power to set us free – and in John 15:3 it has the power to

cleanse our hearts. In John 17:17 we are told that the Word of God has the power to sanctify us – to enable us to grow in Christlikeness.

- ILL. – The power of God’s Word can be illustrated by the true story from which the novel *Mutiny on the Bounty* was based. Nine mutineers (six native men and 12 Tahitian women) were put ashore at Pitcairn Island in 1790. One sailor soon began distilling alcohol and the little colony was quickly plunged into debauchery and vice.

Within ten years only one white man survived, surrounded by native women and children born in their debauchery. In an old chest this sailor found a Bible and began to read it. He was soon teaching it to the others.

In 1808 the USS Topaz discovered the Pitcairn Island. They found it to be prosperous, with no jail, no whiskey, no crime, and no debauchery. The Word of God had transformed that colony.

- The Word of God has amazing power. Do you remember what happened in the city of Ephesus in Acts 19? We’re told that a great revival broke out and even those who were practicing magic and witchcraft brought all their books and burned them.
- But listen to how Acts 19:20 summarizes that incident. It says, “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” It was the Word

of God that was working to accomplish that. The Word of God is living and active. It is powerful to change lives.

- ILL. – Have you ever seen those commercials on TV where they make a certain cleanser appear to clean all by itself? Phooey! Cleansers are like scrub brushes. They just sit there and do nothing until you put your hand on them and scrub like crazy!
- But the Word of God is truly different. It will (in fact) do all the work. It is like a lion – all you need to do is to let it out of its cage. Just turn it loose and it will do the work God intends. (Pause) But there is a third characteristic of God’s Word, and that is – it is:

C. Sharp

- Go back to Heb. 4:12, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword...” The word for “sharper” (there) basically means “to cut.” It has an amazing ability to cut.
- In fact, *not only* is it sharp – it is sharper than *any* two-edged sword. The two-edged sword was the primary weapon of the Roman Empire. In fact, when Paul was describing the believer’s armor (in Eph. 6) he was doing that based on the armor of a typical Roman soldier. And the one weapon he carried was the sword.

- That's why Paul called the Word of God the sword of the Spirit (in Eph. 6:17). It is the one and only offensive weapon in our spiritual armor. It is the Word of God that the HS uses in our lives to change us and to conform us into the image of Christ.
- And, by the way, if you are *not* spending time in God's Word, that is like trying to fight the Christian fight without a sword. That isn't going to work very well. If that is the case, it should be no wonder why Satan is running all over you.
- But over and over again in Scripture we see the Word of the Lord described as a sword. In Is. 49:2 the prophet Isaiah was speaking of the mission of the Servant of the Lord (or the Messiah), and he said of Him, "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword..." The words of the Messiah would be like a sharp sword.
- In the Book of Revelation we see the Lord Jesus described this way: "...out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword..." (That's 1:16), "the One who has the sharp two-edged sword..." (That's 2:12), and "from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations..." (That's 19:15).
- This is all pointing to the Word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword. It is by the Word of God that the nations will be judged.

(Pause) Well, carrying the idea of cutting even further, the author of Hebrews goes on to a third main point, which is:

III. THE CUTTING OF GOD'S WORD (v. 12b)

- Go back to 4:12 again, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
- The Word of God has the power to pierce and to penetrate. It has the power to pierce through any human defense, and it has the power to go all the way into the innermost thoughts and intentions of the human heart.
- The Word of God can cut through all our flimsy excuses for *not* believing God. It can cut through all the lies we tell ourselves. It has the ability to expose who we really are (deep down inside).
- One pastor said the Bible is like an MRI. An MRI can expose what is beneath the surface, all the way through to the innermost parts.
- John Piper writes, "One of the functions of the Word of God...is that it penetrates very deep—like a sword through tough, hard layers—and makes judgments about what's there."

- The word for “judge” (in v. 12) does *not* mean “to condemn.” It means “to assess.” It is the Greek word “kritikos” from which we get the English word “critic.” Some translations use the word “discerner.”
- It means “to sit and analyze evidence and come to a conclusion.” This means the Word of God is able to go to the deepest part of our inner man, and to assess what is really there, good or bad.
- No surgeon’s knife was ever more skillful or more effective than the Word of God. It removes all our defenses and it goes to the deepest part of our being to reveal and expose the true condition of our hearts.
- By the way, this verse is *not* saying that men are made up of three parts. The Greek words for “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably elsewhere in the NT – and generally we have to say that man is made up of two parts (the outer man and the inner man).
- That is another sermon for another day, but what this verse is talking about is the ability of the Word of God to penetrate down to the deepest level of our being.
- And let me throw in another “by the way” here. Because this is true, that is one reason why some people can’t seem to find any time for God’s Word.

The truth of the matter is, they don’t *want* to be exposed to God’s Word because they don’t want God’s Word to expose them!

- They have no interest in going to church and sitting under the preaching of the Word of God. They have a Bible sitting on their coffee table collecting dust. As soon as someone begins quoting Scripture they shut them down because they don’t want to hear it.
- Why? Because the Word of God reveals sin and reveals the true condition of the heart. As Jay Adams puts it, “People do not like the revealing nature of the Scriptures, and will often attempt to avoid all contact with it.”
- And one more “by the way” here (while I’m on a roll): The Bible was not really written to make you feel good about yourself. It was written to expose our sin and to lead us to Christ. It was written to reveal who we really are and change us into what He wants us to become.
- The Word of God can judge the thoughts and the intents of the heart. When we see someone’s actions, we can’t know the motives behind those actions. But the Word of God has the power to expose those inner secrets. It has the power to judge our secret thoughts and our inner motives.

- It has the power to reveal to us our inner sin and rebellion. It has the power to convict of the truth of our condemnation apart from God's saving grace. It has the power to show us the wretchedness of our wicked hearts before a holy God.
- The Word of God can pierce through all our hypocrisy and all our self-righteousness – and show us who we really are. It can pierce through our self-sufficiency and show us our true need for God's grace.
- The Word of God rips up the mask and shows our true person. It shows who we are deep down inside. It brings us face to face with ourselves. (Pause) But the author of Hebrews takes it even deeper than that. So the last thing we see in this text is:
- And when it comes to the judgment of the lost, there will be *none* with any excuse that will keep them from the holy wrath of God. They will *not* be able to give any kind of excuse or offer any kind of legitimate reason for hardening their hearts and *not* believing in Christ.
- Remember now, that is what all this is about (in context). It all ties to v. 11, “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.” And what was their disobedience? Unbelief! (3:19)
- And oh my friend – please hear this – there is no one else in this world we will give an account to but God. He alone is the One with whom we have to do. We don't need to worry about what anyone else thinks. It is only what He thinks that makes any difference.

IV. THE CONVICTION OF GOD'S WORD (v. 13)

- Look with me at v. 13, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”
- You can't hide anything from God. Literally (in the Greek) this means “*not* even one thing is hidden from Him.” He knows your heart. He knows your deepest thoughts. He knows your inner motives. You can't lie to Him.
- That phrase “with whom we have to do” means “to whom is our account.” We are accountable to only One – and the One we are accountable to knows every last detail of our lives. Every secret sin, every skeleton in the closet, is laid open and bare before Him.
- Folks, that's why we can never stand before Him in our own righteousness. We can only stand before Him with the imputed righteousness of Christ credited to our account through saving faith.

- What's at stake here? Eternity is at stake. What is it that will guard our hearts from unbelief? It is the Word of God. It is the true gospel. And that word must be united with saving faith. We have to *believe* God's Word.
- We have to have something that is able to help us overcome the deceitfulness of sin (3:13). We need something sharp enough to pierce through all the deception of Satan. We need something that is powerful enough to help us properly assess our inner thoughts and intentions.
- There is only one thing – the Word of God. That is our only hope. The good news is, we have that Word. We have what we need. The only question is, “Are we heeding that Word?”
- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER