



THE BIBLE

WEEK 13
05.28.17

FOCUS VERSE

Psalm 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

LESSON TEXT

Luke 5:1–7

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

John 5:39

39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

Acts 17:10–13

10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.



FOCUS THOUGHT

The Bible should be our daily road map as we travel toward Heaven.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Welders and Philosophers

Writing in the December 2015 issue of *World Magazine*, Janie B. Cheaney quoted a politician as saying, “Welders make more money than philosophers—we need more welders and less philosophers.” This same politician once used basket weaving as his example of a useless academic degree. Perhaps he should have stayed with basket weaving since fact checkers quickly pointed out that professional philosophers earn 78 percent more on average than professional welders. More importantly, as Cheaney reminded us, the problems of modern society do not stem from too much study of philosophy, but neglect of philosophy. The politician Cheaney quoted meant to say “fewer philosophers” rather than “less philosophers”; but ironically, modern

society is in a crisis of “less philosophers” unwilling to face the eternal questions of life.

“We are all philosophers,” Cheaney wrote. “Everyone gropes for meaning and truth, even if they’ve convinced themselves such things don’t exist. It’s built into [our] original design.” But Cheaney also wrote that “we are all welders, tasked with fusing the scattered pieces of our lives into a unified whole.”

Most people live fragmentary, meaningless lives either ignoring the answers in God’s Word or substituting watered-down doctrine and religious traditions. Only those truths and choices in accordance with the Bible will weld together an integrated life worth living. Society needs philosopher-welders immersed in the wisdom of the Lord.

OUTLINE

- I. THE POWER OF THE WORD
- II. THE BENEFITS OF THE WORD
- III. THE ANCHOR OF THE WORD

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The Bible is the most important and powerful book in the world. It is also one of the most controversial. Few other books have been attacked, misrepresented, misunderstood, and quoted out of context as much as the Bible. The reason is that the Bible is God’s authoritative message of Himself to the world. The original manuscripts of the Bible were inspired by God down to the smallest letter. The words of the Bible are the words of God. Because the Bible is God’s Word, it impacts every aspect of human life. Those who believe find in it a rich, fulfilling life here and the certain hope of eternal life with Christ.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE POWER OF THE WORD

Throughout most of the two thousand years of the church age, the vast majority of Christians did not own a Bible. The availability of the Bible as we know it today resulted from the combination of three developments that also ushered in the modern world: the mechanization of papermaking and bookbinding, the invention of the movable-type printing press, and the proliferation of basic literacy. Before the printing press, Bibles had to be hand copied. They were enormously expensive multi-volume works. Even with the invention of movable type, print Bibles were so expensive that only the libraries of universities, monasteries, and the homes of a few very wealthy families would contain a copy. For nearly one hundred years after Gutenberg produced the first movable-type Bible, historians know of only a single copy of any printed Bible that

was privately owned. Those churches fortunate enough to have portions of the Bible would often lock them away or chain them to the pulpits to keep them from being stolen.

The huge demand for less expensive Bibles eventually brought the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, followed quickly by the American Bible Society in 1816. These societies generated numerous innovations in printing, which drove down costs and eventually resulted in most families being able to own their own family Bible. Today, in North America it is not uncommon for a person to own a dozen print Bibles in addition to a multiplicity of electronic Bibles. This means that a personal collection of Bibles today can be larger and more diverse than the most prestigious universities before the nineteenth century. The Word of God is available to the average person as never before in history.

It seems inconceivable that most of church history is marked by a lack of direct access to the written Bible. Because God knew this would be the case, He created the Bible so it would speak to the ears of the hearers as well as the eyes of the readers. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). In fact, there is a great deal of evidence the Bible was meant to be read aloud. Paul instructed the church at Colossae, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16).

Jewish worship, especially after the development of the synagogue, always centered on the reading of prescribed portions of the Old Testament so the entire text would be read aloud in a year. This practice was carried on by the church with the addition of the New Testament. Thus, Timothy was instructed, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (I Timothy 4:13). Because audio Bibles are now available in many formats, modern Christians can benefit greatly from listening to the Bible while going about their daily tasks. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7).

Of course, hearing the Bible is not sufficient if we do not also apply it to our lives.

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1). God has called ministers of the Word whom He empowers to assist the believer in understanding and applying it correctly to life situations. These ministers read the Bible aloud so believers hear it, interpret the Bible so hearers understand its meaning, and provide direction so they may correctly apply it. During the long period when the Bible was not directly available to most believers, church leaders moved away from this vital work of the ministry. The resulting strict division between clergy and laity hid and distorted the truth of the Word rather than proclaiming and explaining it. Following the sinful pattern of their society, they became lords over the church rather than servants (Matthew 20:25–28).

Ultimately, believers are responsible for testing the accuracy of what they receive from their leaders and determining for themselves the proper application. God has called pastors and teachers to assist us in this task, but we cannot abdicate to our leaders that which is our personal obligation. This is why the Jews of the synagogue in Berea were called "more noble than those in Thessalonica." Both groups received the message of Paul and Silas and were persuaded of its truth, but the Bereans "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). In God's kingdom, nobility does not come from unquestioning trust in our leaders, but from constant examination of our own ideas and those of our leaders against the unerring yardstick of the Bible. Living our lives in the Word requires that the Word become alive in us through daily reading of, listening to, and studying the Bible.

We must fight the tendency to vest the church in the pulpit rather than the pew. We all worship together, study together, learn together, and grow together. Church leaders are uniquely equipped to serve congregations by their callings, spiritual gifts, biblical education, and dedication to prayer and study, but their ultimate purpose is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12). Good leaders infuse every believer with an enthusiasm for hearing, reading, studying, and living the Bible. Ideally, the Bible should

become so much a part of us that our decisions, imaginations, and desires are guided by a thought process permeated with the Word.

Just as the Bible does not belong only to a professional class of clergy, so the proclamation of its message is not restricted to elders of the church. Every member of the body of Christ is commanded to teach and admonish one another through speech and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). We are called to be witnesses to the world by our acts of love, lifestyles of holiness, and wise speech. In our increasingly secularized society with its distrust of anyone who takes the Bible seriously, we are tempted to withdraw from the public square and treat the truth as a private matter best left unspoken.

While fears of social, legal, and even physical retribution may not be wholly unfounded, the church has always had its greatest growth when confronted by a hostile society. One might think the legal persecution of Paul would have had a chilling effect on the spread of the gospel, but the opposite was true: “And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:14).

Unless the word of Christ dwells in us richly (Colossians 3:16), we may be lured into rancorous debates and tempted to attack people rather than to defend the gospel. The more the Word becomes a part of us, the less we will feel drawn by such destructive practices. Thus meditating on the Word brings together all of our hearing, heeding, reading, and speaking of the Bible and molds them into a coherent whole by the Spirit of its divine author. “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2). We are to contemplate, examine, and focus ourselves on the Word, making it a vital part of our thought processes. Meditation takes that which we know and makes it that by which we reason. As such, all thinking becomes clearer through the lens of the Word.

II. THE BENEFITS OF THE WORD

Peter warned us (II Peter 3:16) that the Scriptures are often hard to understand and can be twisted destructively by those who are *ignorant* (literally, “uneducated or un-disciplined”) and *unstable* (literally, “weak or

unestablished”). The Bible can be destructive to those who focus on words, phrases, or verses without interpreting them in the context of their passage, book, and overall purpose in the Word. Art can be ruined by an artist’s excessive focus on technique, media, tools, and methods that draw attention away from the artwork. Similarly, excessive use of proof-texting, or finding a verse—regardless of its context—that “proves” a point, distorts the meaning of the Bible and robs it of its power as the Word of God.

Those willing to become disciples of the Bible by expending the time and effort necessary to be instructed in its meaning find in it rich benefits. It is the only fully trustworthy guide for the individual’s path of life (Proverbs 3:6). Through it, God leads us in the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). Without its guidance, we are in constant danger of slipping (Psalm 17:5). But by it, we learn the way we should go and are guided by God’s own eye (Psalm 32:8). Although the Bible provides instruction in true worship, it is not just a sacramental handbook. (See I Corinthians 11.) Although it teaches us how to manifest true religion, it is not intended to just make us religious. (See James 1:27.) Rather, it is the central core of a Christian’s entire way of life.

The Bible is the most powerful book in the world because it reveals the mind of the Almighty. As such, it demands extra respect and careful treatment. This is not to say that a Bible is an enchanted book of mystical knowledge. It is not the believer’s rabbit foot or four-leaf clover. We do not recite its verses as our Christian “abracadabra.” The Bible does not provide us with a set of sacred mantras through which we impose our will upon the universe.

As a book, a Bible is little different from any other literary work, but its contents are the Word of God. Its words convey the very thoughts of God and express His self-revelation to mankind. Some may be tempted to become bibliolaters (book worshippers), worshipping the Bible rather than the One who inspired it. Some may twist the Scriptures to their own destruction through a lack of instruction and grounding in the Word. Others may seek to become biblio-sorcerers,

seducing, deceiving, and controlling people and things around them by muttering out-of-context verses.

The power of the Bible does not come by quoting it but by obeying it. God desires to use the power of His revelation to bring people to Him and to instruct the believers in unchanging truth. As harmful as the misuse of the Bible can be, it can be thousands of times more beneficial when used correctly.

God uses the authoritative message of the Bible to edify, bring healing, purify, reprove, rebuke, correct, and instruct. Those who follow His Word find nourishment for the soul and providential protection through all of life's unpredictable happenings. Its power is not in the paper, binding, and ink, or even the letters, words, and sentences, but in the Spirit of God who inspired it. We may use it as a set of tools, but we must be changed by it as an expression of God Himself.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:14-17).

III. THE ANCHOR OF THE WORD

The facts of science have changed as humans have become more aware of the universe around them and developed better tools for scientific examination. The facts of history have changed as previously unknown evidence has surfaced and historical tools and techniques have been refined. The facts of daily living have changed as societies shift and mold themselves to new technologies and ideas. Even people are constantly changing as a result of maturation, education, and experience. All the world and all its "truths" are changing, but God remains the same (Numbers 23:19; Job 23:13; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 6:17; 7:24).

If the Bible had been made up of the thoughts of human beings, it would have been outmoded and self-contradictory a few centuries after Moses began to pen it. Instead, it is the work of the unchanging God who knows all from the beginning. Correctly interpreting it depends upon knowing something about the culture, history, and language of the people who formed its initial audiences, but God used that changing canvas to present an unchanging revelation. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19).

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 1:23-2:2).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

People of the last two centuries are more fortunate than at any time since the founding of the church because inexpensive copies of the Bible translated into their native languages are readily available to nearly all Christians. Surely, the reforms and revivals leading to the modern Apostolic movement became possible as a direct result of this abundance of Bibles in the hands of ordinary men and women. By the instruction of the Spirit, the eyes of our spiritual forefathers were opened to biblical truth hidden from the masses of Christians, although plainly stated in Scripture.

Through the work of the called ministry, discussions with fellow believers, and listening to the leading of the Spirit, we continue to open ourselves to God's use of the Bible to instruct, enlighten, and lead us. "The scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering and the most comfortable way of dying" (John Flavel).

The Bible is not just a monologue. It does not need to be only God speaking to us as we read or listen. Instead, the Spirit-filled believer interacts with the Bible by taking advantage of a personal relationship with its divine author. Matthew Henry wrote, "The Bible is a letter God has sent to us; prayer is a letter we

send to Him," but it is far more than a letter. Through prayer and meditation on the Word, Bible study becomes an open dialogue with God that frequently becomes a friendly chat between a heavenly Father and His beloved children. ■

REFLECTIONS

- What is the proper place of called elders in relation to the Bible? How was this perverted during the many centuries when access to a written Bible was extremely rare?
- Now that most Christians have a personal copy of the Bible, is there still a reason to read Bible passages aloud during church services?
- What would be the proper method for dealing with a situation in which a saint believes the pastor is misinterpreting or misapplying Scripture? What would be the appropriate response of the saint? of the pastor?
- Peter warned that those who are uneducated and unestablished in the Word can twist Scriptures to their own destruction (II Peter 3:16). Should this warning cause us to increase personal study of the Bible or to avoid it as too dangerous? Explain your answer.
- Why is the Bible the only fully trustworthy anchor and guide for an individual's life? Give some specific examples of how the Bible has guided your life path.
- How do we receive and invoke the power of the Bible without falling into the excesses of bibliolatry or biblio-sorcery?