

September 21 2008 – SERMON SUMMARY

God's Word is our Life! (Dt.32:44-47, Jn.6:57-69)

Introduction: What place does God's Word have in your life? Not in theory or in your good intentions, not what you say you believe, but what you really practice when it comes to the Word? This message isn't an attempt to put a guilt trip on anyone; guilt is not usually an adequate motivation. We want to talk about God's Word & how to get your life connected up with its powerful message that has made such an impact on human history; it can make such a difference in you!

1) In Dt.32, Moses was about to pass off the scene; his ministry was about over among the Israelites, so he wanted to leave them with some memorable words that would capture their imagination, sum up God's message & dealings with them over the previous 40 years, & serve as a reminder & stimulation to them in the next chapter of their history.

- So Moses wrote an amazing song which began by proclaiming the Name of the LORD & His praises, reminding the Israelites how exquisitely God had treated them during their sojourn in the desert (deliverance, provision, mercy). Then Moses reminded them what idolaters they had been & how quickly they abandoned the true God when a "better option" came along. This tendency of the human heart to unfaithfulness is the major theme Moses warns the people about in his song, though he also points to Yahweh as the only Rock that can serve as a refuge against their sinfulness.

- When Moses finished singing his song, he told the Israelites, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law." In other words, if parents don't take God's Word seriously (the word about their inclination toward idolatry), they won't be able to command their children to obey. There will be no authority in their attempts. Only if you really take God's Word to heart will you have the moral strength & authority to command your children & lead them in coming to know & worship the true God!

- Then Moses adds extra incentive: "These are not just idle words for you – they are your life!" Is the Word of God your life? Do you practice it as such? What motivation would it take in your heart for God's Word to become your "life"?

- Dallas Willard (Christian teacher & writer) says that few people in evangelical churches actually read their Bibles & pray, because these practices haven't been presented to them as an "essential part of an overall life that is highly desirable." Christians have failed to comprehend the Bible as their "treatise on reality," providing us the only real power source for significantly changing & transforming our lives (Jer.23:29). But the Word is so powerful that we seek to tame it, tone it down, get it under our control, so that even reading our Bible on a regular basis can collapse into legalism.

- Just like the Pharisees reduced God's Word to legalism, so we reduce discipleship to Christ to a series of religious activities, like reading the Bible, praying, going to church, witnessing. Christian discipleship is not about ordering your life so you find some time for "religious activities"; biblical discipleship means that we order our whole lives around the Word! The Word is our Life! The Word which in the beginning brought order out of chaos will bring order out of your chaos!

2) This was the same message Jesus was trying to get across to His followers beside the Sea of

Galilee one day, when He used some radical words & images to wake up their sleeping consciences & challenge their smugness & self-sufficiency.

- That day He observed the multitudes pursuing Him: they had come running after Him the day before, running around the shore of the lake, then spent hours hanging on His words; the next day they crossed the lake again trying to find Him. Yet Jesus didn't get all excited because of those multitudes clamoring for Him to be their king; He knew the selfish motivation that underlay everything they did. So He used a drastic parable to expose their selfishness & shock them into realizing their true life situation: "If you want to experience real life, you'll have to eat my flesh & drink my blood!" It was a graphic image of the cross in its practical, everyday meaning for discipleship. Yet Jesus' words call our bluff, because we are not nice & orderly inside, but perverse, deceitful & broken – a selfish, unloving race that puts up a good front, acting like we're clean & self-sufficient, when in fact we're thoroughly contaminated, helpless children!

- Our will is so corrupted by our sinfulness that we need a total replacement. What the O.T. prophets spoke of as a new covenant & a new heart, the N.T. calls the new birth; when Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be born again, he was incredulous: "how can a full-grown man start all over again from zero?" Jesus told him it was the *sine qua non* for seeing the Kingdom of heaven! Both James & Peter indicate that this new birth happens thanks to the Word (Jas.1:16, 1 Pe.1:23).

- The "new creature" grows the same way he or she was born: spiritual life is nourished by feeding on the Word! Yet many of Jesus' followers decided His words about eating His flesh were too harsh & they turned back from following Him. Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit & life."

- How we "feed on the Word" is made clear in the "hand illustration" (one verb for each finger of the hand): you need to hear it, read it, study, memorize, & meditate. But if you only hear it, you won't remember more than 10-15% (& you won't practice it); of what you only read, you will likely remember only 15-25%. What you study will stay with you better, 25-50%; & what you memorize, you will retain from 80-100% (depending on the quality of your memory).

- The thumb (meditation) is the most important, relating to all the rest: it's not about a certain body posture, holding your hands a certain way, or emptying your mind. Biblical meditation is about filling your mind with God's truth, mulling it over. Meditating on God's Word means thinking deeply about its meaning & application to every situation & relationship in life.

- Why should you do this? Jesus' Words have a cleansing effect on our lives (Jn.15:3), & your life will not be clean without the Word. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." But our lives cannot be clean when we sit for hours in front of our TV's, listening to foul language, laughing at off-color jokes & sexual innuendos, watching all the violence, or gazing at the dark side of humanity portrayed more & more graphically & openly in the media, music, movies, Internet. We think it doesn't affect us, but our computer-like brain stores it all up in huge image banks. There's no way to get our minds clean – of the images, feelings, anger, hurt, lust, pride, idolatry – without getting deep into God's Word.

3) God's Word became flesh – human! That's how powerful His Word is! What God was seeking to do was capture our imagination with His words & parables, His life & example, His cross & resurrection. By capturing our imagination He can make us know the attraction & power of His Word to renew our mind & transform our life (Rom.12:2)!

▪ Did you ever enter an "Imaginarium"? My sons always loved to visit the Imaginarium when they were young, with all its fantastic toys, games & other entertainment that you had never imagined. Think of God's Word as His "imaginarium," where He has laid out all the good things that He has imagined & planned for us. But if we don't ever get deep into His Word, we don't find out about it or experience it. Imagine what would happen if Christ really got ahold of your imagination ... so that all the energy you presently spend fantasizing about your pleasure, comfort, strength, & success, were directed toward fulfilling His will, growing in Christlikeness, loving & serving others, advancing God's Kingdom?! Imagine that!

Conclusion: Would you commit to letting God's Word order your priorities, values, decisions, actions? This is what it means to follow Christ: His Word becomes your *Life!*

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