

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 1:3

SERMON THEME: "The Bible: More Than Just Words!"

SERMON TEXT: Hebrews 4:12 (Read first)

Dear Friends in Christ,

The word "power" probably brings to mind a wide range of mental images for different people. For some, it may be events in the realm of nature, like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes or tornados, wild fires, floods, and the like. Others would think of man-made power: nuclear power plants, bombs and ships, dams that produce hydroelectric power, jet propulsion, devices utilizing solar energy, or other products of modern technology. Then there is intangible power; great military might, corporate enterprise, political power, and the power of public opinion and the vote. We speak also of the power of hate and love.

What would you say is the greatest power on this earth? Is there in fact one power that exceeds all others, a greatest power of all? For us Christians this should be easy to answer! What is greater than all of nature, and actually controls it? Where does everything in the material realm, and all science, originate? And what is the source of all love, faith, wisdom, and intelligence? We need only turn to the first words of the book we call the Bible: "In the beginning God created..."

God merely spoke. Elohim, the Hebrew word for God, uttered words, and the work of making the heavens and the earth out of nothingness began! Just words! He didn't use anything but the spoken word! Immediately, at the beginning of time, the power of God speaking became visible and felt. The power of His words reached a climax when He created beings in His own image—a man and a woman; thinking, loving creatures capable of reproducing in a way that perpetuated the work of creating human beings! All other forms of life on earth were created to reproduce as well. At the end of six days, by the power of His word, God had created all that exists, including life itself.

But as we know, soon there was trouble in paradise. The

image of God, that of being holy, without sin, was lost when the first couple exercised their free will and disobeyed God. Now sin tarnished the work of creation. The wages of sin was death. Our omniscient God knew this would happen, and already before the foundation of the world was laid, He planned a way for sin to be forgiven! Again, God spoke. Now he made a promise that would give hope to all sinners; a Savior would come! He would crush the head of satan. He would make possible a return to holiness! Now the power of God's Word would become abundantly clear in a most wonderful way: Sin-blackened hearts could be made whiter than snow! The grave would lose its power, and paradise would be restored!

One thing we quickly learn as we turn the pages of Scripture: The God of the Bible keeps His word! The same power that created all things now stands behind the written Word! Every promise the LORD made to His people Israel and to His prophets has been kept! Now in these latter days, every word spoken to us, every promise of Scripture, has been, and is being kept! No atheist or heretic, no skeptic or unbeliever, has ever been able to prove otherwise. Every true Christian knows through life's experiences God is true to His Word! We, by faith, can clearly see that God's Word is as Daniel said, a "Book of truth" (11:21). Not only is it infinitely reliable—to the point we can stake our souls on it—but it has POWER, the power to change hearts and lives, *and* alter our circumstances in life!

Our text enlightens us on this point. Notice again the first phrase: "For the Word of God is living and active..." It is "More Than Just Words!" More than ink on paper. It is God still speaking and working. Earlier in biblical history the LORD spoke audibly to Adam and Eve and His chosen leaders including Noah and Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets. Little by little what He said was written down with God's help—we call this inspiration by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the God-head. After the New Covenant began with the coming of the Messiah, our Savior Jesus, everything God had to say was recorded in this way. The apostle Paul assures us in 2 Timothy (3:16) that "all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." The Bible has the power to accomplish these things! By it we are empowered to obey God's holy law, an expression

of His will, showing how we are to love Him and all people.

Above all, we have the Gospel, the good news of our salvation that is so freely offered for the sake of the life, death, and resurrection of God's only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! As Paul said, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith..." (Romans 1:16)! You and I cannot save our own souls. *We don't have the power.* Our good works fall short. Only Jesus can save us; it is by His power, His good work of victory over sin, death, and the devil, that we have any hope for a never-ending life in glory after this one! Jesus' power, and His righteousness, come to us by faith, and Scripture says "faith comes from what is heard, ...by the preaching of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Isn't that the main reason we're here, to hear the Word?

What does this say about daydreaming or sleeping during the reading of the lessons or the sermon? Or about skipping Bible study or home devotions? Our souls are saved by the power of God's Word! We cannot come to know our heavenly Father or Jesus, or hear the voice of the Holy Spirit except by the working of the words of this Book in our hearts! How else can we learn of the grace of God; of His love for us? Think about it. You and I would not be saved today, we would not be forgiven our sins, we would have no hope of heaven, were it not for the words we have heard and read from the Bible! As we are told here, the Word is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow..." It cuts through the rock-hard wall of sin right into the deepest places of our being, exposing our sinful nature and our guilt, laying bare our inherent rebellion against a holy God. The law of God has condemned our sinful ways, showed us our shameful condition, and instilled within us a standard for living that pleases almighty God!

And "discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart," it fills the spiritual void created by sin with the heart-changing gospel, the good news that we are not lost after all! God truly loves us! Jesus really cares! So much so that He sacrificed Himself to atone, to pay for our sins! His life, His death, His resurrection—all of this was personal, for you, for me! It is in the name of Jesus that we have forgiveness, in the name of the Son of God that we have hope for an unspeakably better life to come! This same Jesus IS the Word, the *Logos*! "In the begin-

ning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He is embodied in the Bible, the essential substance of Holy Scripture. As He is holy, the essence of perfection, so is the Word we know as the Bible, or God's Word. To say it another way, because Jesus Christ is made manifest, or incarnate, in the Scriptures, then the words before us today are holy and alive as Jesus is holy and alive today! And powerful! And active!

Again, the words before us, "The Word of God is living and active..."! It has power! It can change your heart in the time it takes to say, "Lord Jesus, come into my heart—let me live for you!" This can be the difference between spiritual life and death! If sin lingers in your heart this morning, now's the time to let the power of God's love move your heart to repent of sin and begin to live and love like Jesus did! The power of God's forgiveness will bring peace and a joy that nothing else this side of heaven can give you! Believe God's promises; believe His Word! And all the power of God will be brought to bear in your life!

The Lord sees into your heart and mine. Nothing is hidden from Him. Ezekiel said it: "There is no secret that can be hidden from You" (28:3). And following our text, "Before Him ...all (hearts) are open and visible to Him to whom we must render account" (v. 13). God is aware of the intent of our hearts. He knows whether or not our faith is genuine. He is able to know that the Spirit of the Living Christ is truly Lord of our lives, OR that we are Christian in name only. Our encouragement today is to LET the power of the Word of God show forth in our daily lives! We need to fully grasp the truth that "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). "With God nothing is impossible" (Luke 1:37). *Through faith and prayer all the power of God is available to us!* We need to be able to say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13)! If only we believe! If only we ask!

The impossible becomes possible only by divine power, and that power comes to us through His Word, the Scriptures, the Holy Bible. It looks pretty much like any other book from the outside. But unlike any other book, it is God speaking, calling sinful man to repentance, promising forgiveness and salvation, and showing us the way to love and peace. The words on its pages speak to every conceivable human condition and emotion;

it exposes sin, promises justice when evil befalls us, directs us in providing human care, consoles us when we lose a loved one, upholds us when our personal lives are in crisis. This Book is our source of wisdom, and it allows us to join with the angels in singing those powerful anthems of praise, "Glory to God in the Highest"; Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God..." (Revelation 19:1)!

We do well to ask ourselves, "Do I love God's Word?" "Do I cherish my Bible, use it, and depend on it?" "Do I realize it has the power to search my heart, reveal my sin, and extend the offer of free forgiveness for Jesus' sake?" "Am I willing to share the truth about sin and grace with my family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors?" But most importantly, "Do I believe every word and live and sacrifice like Jesus?"

The power to do these things is in the Word itself! All the power of almighty God is at our fingertips! God grant us all a love for the "living and active" Word from God! And the kind of faith that seizes on every word, knowing that our heavenly Father wants only the best for His dear children! Hopefully, with Paul we can all testify, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it IS the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18)! To God be the glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Rev. Donald P. Tonack

