

The Sword of the Word

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Hebrews chapter 4, emphasizing the power and precision of the Word of God. It highlights the importance of faith in allowing the Word to bring rest and transformation, cutting between soul and spirit, thoughts and intentions. The message stresses the need to heed God's voice immediately, as the Word has the ability to save us from sin and disaster if we listen and obey.

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Description

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Transcript

Hebrews chapter 4, and we're in verses 12 and 13 this evening, Hebrews chapter 4 verses 12 and 13, but I'm going to read from verse 1 through verse 13 so we can get the context, so we can be reminded of where we've been. So Hebrews chapter 4 verse 1, therefore, since the promise remains of entering his rest, let us fear, lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them, but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

For we who have believed do enter that rest, as he said, so I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest. Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works, and again in this place they shall not enter my rest.

Since therefore it remains that some must enter in, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of a disobedience, again he designates a certain day saying in David, today, after such a long time as it has been said, today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is the discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. So he has spoken about the rest that is available for us to enter into, and the fact that some do not enter into that rest. And we said that that rest was, there were different aspects to that rest.

There was the rest of resting in Christ now, in the sense that he has finished the work. We don't need to labor in order to save ourselves. He has done the work and saved us.

To enter into his rest in the sense of trusting him for our day-to-day stresses and problems and anxieties, but also the ultimate rest that comes in heaven. Now he is saying then that it is the word that was preached, that if we hear that word, if we receive the word, that will bring us into that rest. And that's really summing up the last two or three weeks.

So now he comes to the word of God, and it would seem to be almost a new thought, but we must remember that these, particularly in the book of Hebrews, there is a continual thread running right through, and there is no break in the argument from verse one to the last verse at the end of the book. So there's a continual thread, and remember we've done this exercise, you can do it for yourself. You look at any verse, and you'll find a conjunction, a word like and, because, for, or it's the beginning, it's not the beginning of a sentence, you go to the previous verse to find the beginning of the thought.

And of course you can start at the end of the book, and it will take you right back to the beginning of the book. It's a continual one series of thoughts that are all interlinked, so there are no thoughts that are independent of the previous ones. They all connect to one another.

So when he speaks about the word here, and the problem with this verse is that people like to quote this verse because it's a powerful verse. But it is quoted, in a sense, out of context, and we don't fully understand what he is saying because we have not taken it into, in its proper context. So let's have a look at the, at the, the verse.

So the word of God. Remember that Jesus is the word. In John 1 verse 1 it says, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, the logos.

He is the word of God. Hebrews begins by saying that God at different times spoke to the fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us through his son. And so Jesus is the word.

But here he is not speaking of Jesus as the word. While he is, he is always God's word to us, he is specifically speaking here of the spoken word of God. So we, we have the word of God in the form of Jesus Christ.

We have the word of God in the spoken word of God, and we have the word of God in the written word of God. For us it is the written word. When he is referring to Israel, it's the spoken word because God didn't speak to Israel when they came out of Egypt.

He, he did, they didn't have a Bible at that time. Moses wrote, you remember, the first five books of the Bible. So, so that was still in progress.

So God spoke clearly to them on Mount Sinai. God spoke through Moses to the, to the people. Then the word came, and God begins to speak to us through his, through his written word.

So here it's speaking about the written word for us, and for Israel, the spoken word. So the word of God is living and powerful. Now if you have the old King James, it says quick and powerful.

Remember that that word quick does not mean fast in Old English. It means alive. We don't use that word much anymore.

The only place where we still use it, and I'm not even sure if we use it here in America, but certainly in British English, we, we speak about the quick of the nail. Anyone hear that expression? So if you have a thorn and you put it in, it sticks in and it gets into the life, into the, the living part of the nail. That is the quick of the nail, the, the part that is alive.

So, sorry, so we don't use that word at all as far as I know in American English, but it simply means alive. So again, some people who get stuck on the King James come up with all sorts of crazy theories and ideas about the word being speedy. No, the word is not speedy, it is alive.

That's literally the Greek word that it is alive, and it is powerful. Now the word of God is alive. It is not a dead book.

You can study any science in this world, whether they be hard sciences or soft sciences, you can study humanities, you can study engineering, but it is all dead books. They, they do not have life in themselves, they have information, and they do not have the ability to impart life. But the word of God has life in itself.

For those who have come face to face with the word of God and understood that God still speaks through his word, that there is something to his word that is supernatural. I've just begun to read the biography of one of the great believers or leaders of the Christian faith, a martyr in Scotland in the 1500s, when anything other than the state church would result in your death. He was not a clergyman, he wasn't a minister, he was a schoolteacher.

And those days the kids would be taught Greek, until in fact until very recently in many British and South African schools they would be taught Latin, and in some cases Greek. So he was a Greek master, taught Greek. And he was able, owning the word of God, owning the Bible at that time was a criminal offense.

But Scottish seamen or fishermen would go across to Europe, not far across the channel, they would go across to Europe and they would sell their fish and they would bring stuff back. And so this was sort of, they would trade on the one hand and they would fish on the other hand. And they would also bring contraband, illegal stuff back, whiskey and things like that.

But they would also bring Bibles, particularly Greek Bibles, Greek New Testaments, because there was a market for it because it was illegal to have. And so this schoolmaster used the Greek New Testament to teach his boys Greek. It was just a dead book.

It was just a manual that he would, because the reason he used it was because the Greek is beautiful in the New Testament. It's beautiful Greek and there are different styles of Greek. And so he used this as a

handbook to teach the language.

And then his fiancée died of the plague and he was devastated. But as he went back to his classroom and he looked at his New Testament in Greek, which was simply a grammar book, book on grammar for him really. But his eye fell on the passage that he had been analyzing with his students, which was John chapter 14.

Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.

I go away to prepare a place for you. And as his eye fell on that, it came alive. And even though he had taught on that passage many times, not from a theological or spiritual point of view, simply from a grammar point of view, a Greek grammar point of view, suddenly this became real to him.

And he realized, in fact, that there was something more to this book than just a book. And his life was transformed. And the next lesson with his boys, he was different.

They recognized that he was different. And also he was very much in love with his fiancée. And they were about to get married.

They were a month or two away from getting married. And instead of him being devastated, he was joyful because he had come to understand something. And so as a result of this, the parents wanted to know what was going on, and a great revival broke out in that part of Scotland as a result of no preacher, just the Word of God being alive and being able to give life when we read it.

So he's saying the Word of God is alive. For those to whom it is not alive, it is simply because we are not willing to allow God's Word to speak to us. God will only speak to the extent that we are willing to listen.

And so when we are willing to listen, His Word is alive, and it is transforming, and it is powerful. You know my testimony. I've been serving the Lord for over 50 years now.

I've been preaching for 50 years. I've been studying this Word for 50 years as almost a full-time thing. When I wake up in the night, I go through the Word.

What I read on is the Word. What I preach is the Word. And it has never got tired.

It's never got old. It is fresh. It is new every time I come to the Word of God.

And so the Word of God is alive, and it is powerful. It is powerful. It is able to change lives.

And he's going to tell us how powerful it is. The Word of God is able to save. Now remember that this is not the Word that created, but remember that God's Word in the beginning created.

God spoke, and things came into being. And so God's Word, God's spoken Word, is creative, is powerful. But God's written Word is not that much further removed from his spoken Word.

It is still the Word of God. And while God is no longer creating natural things, he is creating spiritual things in the sense of bringing about spiritual change within our lives. And so it is powerful in its ability to transform, in its ability to deal with issues in our hearts and in our lives, if we will only allow it to.

And I've frequently been absolutely amazed in opening the Word of God in order to study it, or to read it, or to preach on it, how that God speaks to my personal situation in a powerful, powerful way. I spend most of my day reading all sorts of things. I mean, we obviously read Facebook.

I read the news, the news feeds. I read the Bible. I read books.

I read commentaries. I probably spend at least nine, ten hours a day reading different things, all sorts of different things. But nothing impacts my life as powerfully as the Word of God.

You sometimes find a saying on Facebook that is poignant, and that strikes you, and that strikes a chord. But it's pretty shallow. It doesn't—it's maybe just, yeah, that's great.

That's a good idea. That's a wonderful thought. But the Word of God is able to interact with us at a level that nothing else can.

And so it is alive, and it is powerful. Now, it is powerful, the writer is saying, because it is sharper than a two-edged sword. So the Word of God is not a blunt instrument.

It is not a hammer or a mallet that you hit people over the head with. Unfortunately, some people use the Word of God in that way. They use the Bible as a blunt instrument to pound people into submission, or to convince people to their way of thinking.

And I guess it's always been so, but it seems to be particularly true in modern politics in America, as more and more people, believers and unbelievers alike, use the Word of God to pound and to hit people over the head with. No, he doesn't say the Word of God is a blunt instrument. It is a sharp instrument.

It is a precise instrument. It is sharper than a two-edged sword. Now, when he speaks about a two-edged sword, that's exactly what it is.

Some swords, like a cutlass, is sharp only on one side. Other swords, like a rapier, are sharp on both sides. And so this is a sword that is sharp on both sides.

In other words, it has two cutting edges. And you know that this is my hobby, and this is something I'm somewhat passionate about, not like for the Word, but still it is something that is of interest. And so it is sharper than a two-edged sword.

The Romans were pretty good at making swords and other forms of cutlery, and some of those have survived, and some of those examples are still existent today. And so you can get a sword or a knife pretty sharp. Doctors use a scalpel, which is simply the same thing, just sharpened a little bit better.

But you can sharpen a sword so that it will cut a piece of paper. If you just stand the piece of paper up on its edge, you fold it and stand it up like that, and you drop the sword on it just slowly, it will slice through it. That's a test of whether it is indeed sharp.

And so knife makers and sword makers know how to sharpen these things, and we're able to make them very, very, very sharp. We speak about scary sharp. You can literally, sharper than a razor.

If it's properly sharp, it will shave cleaner than a Gillette or some kind of razor. So he's saying the Word of God is still sharper than a two-edged sword. And so it doesn't matter how sharp you can get that sword, and there's obviously a limit to which you can get it sharp, depending on the grain size of the steel and so

on, but it doesn't matter how sharp you get it.

The Word of God is still sharper than that. And it's able to divide, it's able to cut and separate to an extent that a sword or even a scalpel is not able to separate. And he gives us three things that it is able to cut between.

And so it is sharper than a two-edged sword. And remember, by the way, that the book of Revelation speaks about Jesus and that out of his mouth proceeds a two-edged sword, and with that he slays the nations. So this is still speaking about the same idea, the Word of God, the Word of God spoken by Jesus in the book of Revelation, the Word of God written for us in the New Testament.

And so it pierces even to the division of soul and spirit. So it cuts and is able to separate between soul and spirit. Now I have to not go into too much detail here, otherwise we're going to end up in another... But man is made up of three parts, body, soul, and spirit.

Soul is the heart, the emotions, the will, the thinking, rational part. The spirit is that which comes from God. And in the unbeliever, the spirit is dormant or dead.

In the believer, the spirit has been made alive. Paul deals with this in the book of Ephesians. The problem is that these two things are almost inseparable, to the extent that there are many theologians who say that there are not two things, there's not a spirit and a soul, there's just one thing, and that's spirit, soul, and then body.

Psychiatrists and psychologists tend to say, no, there is also no difference between the soul and the spirit. But the Bible makes a distinction between those two things. And we did a series a long time ago, it is on YouTube, and you can look it up, Body, Soul, and Spirit, if you don't remember the teaching.

So what we have here is two things that we cannot even, in thinking about it or debating it, easily separate, to the extent that to many people they are the same thing. And yet the Word of God is able to divide between them, and to separate what is soul and what is spirit. What are those things, those thoughts in my mind? Remember that everything happens in our minds, that the thoughts in our minds, some of those minds come from my emotions, and we generally call, the Bible generally calls that flesh, and some of those thoughts come from God.

And I think that we've all experienced the difficulty of saying, well, is this God speaking? Is this God leading me, or is this just me? And so we have difficulty in separating those things, and yet the Word of God is able to separate them. It is that precise. And when the Word of God is preached or read by those who are willing to hear the Word of God, folk are often testified to the preciseness in which the Word of God addresses their personal situation.

So the Word of God is able to address our personal situation in a very, very precise way, if we allow it to do so. Now remember that in everything that we're saying this evening, and I certainly hope that we can get through this verse this evening. I think we should be able to.

But in everything that we're saying, the Word of God is alive. It is powerful. It is sharper than any two-edged sword.

It's able to pierce to the dividing of soul and spirit, that all of this is subject to my allowing God to do that. Remember that the chapter begins in verse 2, the gospel was preached to us as well as to them, but the

word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. See the importance of the context.

He begins, he's speaking about the word. He's still speaking about the word. So he's saying the word didn't profit them.

In other words, the word was not alive for them. It was not powerful for them. It was not able to address their situation.

Why? Because it was not mixed with faith. They did not believe. They did not believe that God was speaking.

They did not believe God's word. And so whatever power the Word of God has, it is limited by my willingness to believe and to obey. If I am willing to believe and to obey, then God's word is able to perform powerful stuff in my life.

If I resist, it is able to do nothing. And remember I've told you before, because this is just the best illustration, is that massive rock in South Africa up in the Drakensberg, it must be all of 20 feet tall and probably 15 feet in circumference. And there's a tree, a yellowwood tree, growing right through the middle, and a little seed had fallen down there a couple of hundred years old, because these trees got very, very old.

A few hundred years ago, a little seed fell in that crack, and that seed began to grow and began to split that rock so that now there's a probably a two-foot gap in that rock which used to be together, but just with a little crack. Just the seed, that seed is so powerful. The trees in the redwoods and the sequoias, some of them are 2,000 years old, just comes from a little seed, and yet there are these massive things, the biggest living things on earth from that little seed.

But that little seed, if you take it and put it in a hostile environment, just don't give it water, what will happen to it? Absolutely nothing. It will not grow, it will frizzle up, it'll die, it'll eventually become nothing. Put it in its right environment, and it is powerful.

It splits rocks apart. It grows into massive living things that are able to survive 2,000 years of history. The Word of God is exactly the same way.

You receive it in the right conditions, and it is alive, it is powerful, it is able to address your situation. But you receive it into a hostile environment where there is no soil, or there is no water, or there is no light. Just to use those natural things, it will achieve nothing.

It just dies right there. Remember, the sower goes out and he sows. What does the sower sow? He sows the gospel, he sows the Word of God.

Some of it falls on the wayside, and what happens to it? The birds take it and eat it up, nothing goes, nothing happens. Other fallen, stony places, they begin to germinate, but there's no depth of soil. When the sun comes up, it just frizzles up and dies.

And so, the same principle is applicable here. The Word of God is powerful. If you allow it in that parable of the different kinds of soils to fall in the good soil, it brings forth 100 and 200 fold, massive increases in its viability.

All right, so now, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, or the bone and marrow. Now, if you look, and I'm sure James will be able to correct me here, but I just know about soup bones. And in soup bones, there are times when you have the bone and you have the marrow.

But there are parts in the bone where the bone and the marrow are fused, and you can't separate them because they flow together, little crevices, and there's marrow in there in between the bone. And if you, even, I don't think a skilled surgeon would be able to get in there and separate the marrow out from the bone, those areas where, but the Word of God, and so what is he, is he talking here about physics or about surgery? No, clearly not. He's simply saying this is how powerful the Word of God is, that it's able to do, and it's able to separate things that are, humanly speaking, inseparable, that you can't easily divide.

And so it is able to divide between joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart. The word discerner here is a good word, the Greek word, from the Greek word we get the word critic, a critic, someone who judges. The same root word also is translated judged.

And so the Word of God is a critic, is a judge, and obviously it is able to separate between the thoughts and the intents of the heart. So what are the thoughts and the intents? And these are good translations of the Greek words. A thought is not necessarily an intention.

Thought comes in, goes out, it's gone. But if you entertain that thought, at some stage that thought may lead to an intention. Now at what point does that happen? Well, we don't know.

It's impossible to tell, but at one stage I looked at my neighbor's fancy new blue car, and it was just a thought, nice car. But then I began to say, I'd like to have that car. Something has changed.

So now I make a decision. I have an intention. I'm going to steal his car or I'm going to go out and buy one, whichever way you're inclined.

At what point does the thought become an intention or an intent? Can't say, but the Word of God knows where that point is. Now this is where this becomes very relevant to us, because all sin begins with thoughts. But when that thought becomes an intention, I'm in trouble.

Now I may not have done what I intended to do, so there's still an opportunity to stop the process. But I'm in a very dangerous place because I now have an intention. I'm going to steal my neighbor's Corvair.

So have I done it yet? Well, as far as God is concerned, just about. Remember Jesus said, if you look upon a woman, you've done it, because that intention leads to an action. And so the Word of God is, if it's able to separate between thoughts and intentions, then what is the purpose of separating? You see, this is not about academics.

This is not about saying, well, that's a thought, that's an intention. This is the soul, this is the spirit. No, this is about obedience.

Remember, this whole passage is about believing and obeying. And the problem is that if my thought is a wrong thought, remember the context, we're not going into the land, we want to go back to Egypt. I have a problem.

But if the Word of God is able to cut between, and what would be the purpose of cutting in between? To separate. To cut it off. So he's saying that my thoughts do not need to lead to intentions which lead to sin.

But the Word of God is able to cut and stop the thought right there. And folks, this is real, and this is practical. If I allow the Word of God.

The problem is that we are willful, and so we begin to think along a line, whatever it may be, unforgiveness, lust, greed, anger, whatever. I begin to think along a line. Now, if I've been taught the Word of God, if I've read the Word of God, I know that that is wrong.

If I allow the Word of God to have its work in my life, it will cut that thought and get me back on the right road. But if I reject the Word of God, and I say, I'm not going to listen. I know the Bible says, you shall not, but I'm going to do it anyhow.

I'm in trouble. And so the Word of God is able to save us from ourselves. If we listen to it, and that's the whole point of the passage.

They didn't listen. Today, if you will hear his voice, don't harden your heart. And so when my thoughts begin to go in the wrong direction, don't harden your heart.

Hear the Word of God. You know that that line of thinking is not constructive, is not going to lead to a good outcome. Listen.

Now you can see the importance of not just today, but right now. Because if you're beginning to think down the wrong line of thinking, and the Word of God is there, telling you don't go there. And you say, not now, later.

It's too late, because you've already done it. Because how long does it take you to lose your temper? Hours? Well, the lead up may be hours, but it's like that. Nanoseconds between being on the right side and having lost it.

Just like that. But in between the Word of God has spoken. You know, let it go.

Forgive. Be patient. All of these things.

Now I'm just using that as one example. We can apply that to anything else that we struggle with in our lives. The problem is that we don't allow the Word of God to have its impact on our lives.

And so we ignore it. We say, not today. Never mind today.

Not right now, Lord. You can see. I'm busy here.

I'm in the middle of this argument. Let me finish my argument with my friend first. Then I'll listen.

No, it's too late. The Word of God is able to cut that process right in the middle before it becomes an intention and before the intention becomes sin. And so, folks, this is not theory.

This is reality. But we must give the Word of God its proper place in our lives. We must hear today.

If you will hear his voice, don't resist. Don't harden your hearts. Father, we thank you for your Word.

Lord, that it is powerful. And Lord, it's glorious and it is living. It's able to save us from ourselves.

It's able to save us from sin. It's able to save us from disaster. And yet, Lord, Israel didn't enter into your rest because they didn't listen.

Help us, Lord, to be those who hear your voice and to allow your Spirit to cut into our hearts and to divide between soul and spirit and thoughts and intents, or that we might be able to live the life that you want us to live. Thank you, Lord, that you've not left us to our own devices, Lord, that we don't have to figure these things out for ourselves, but you've given us the answers in your Word, if we'd only receive it and listen and obey. And so, Lord, help us, we pray, that this may be more than just a fancy Bible study and a discussion of words, but, Lord, there may be a reality that affect our lives.

And I pray, Lord, that some life tonight, maybe here or those who are watching online, would be changed powerfully by your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. So we pray that you'd go with us now, keep us and protect us, bring us together again safely on Sunday, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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