

On Reading the Scriptures

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reading the scriptures consecutively to experience God's redemptive work in a vicarious way and to identify with God's people.

Duration: 47:08

Scripture: Exodus 14:21

Topics: "Scriptures"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of quality of spirit in our relationship with God, rather than just focusing on the passage of time. He highlights the significance of sacred history as a means of understanding righteousness and humility through God's acts. The speaker also discusses the value of reading scripture consecutively, as it allows us to immerse ourselves in the experiences of our ancestors and learn from their doubts, unbelief, punishment, repentance, and God's faithfulness. The sermon concludes with a reference to the Passover tradition and the importance of understanding and participating in the story of our ancestors for our own spiritual growth.

Transcript

So, I want to pray. Just read a little bit from Bonhoeffer about the Bible, the Hebrew Bible. So, Lord, what are you after? What are you wanting, my God, to underline for us and impress for us in this whole issue of the genius of the faith incubated and established in the history of Israel? You knew what you were doing, my God.

You picked this Semitic people. You spoke of it and hinted at it through the scriptures. That when you determined the number of the nations, you did so in terms of the sons of Israel.

Always this remarkable alignment that the nations can never escape, though they want to. What is it, my God, that is in Shem, that is the saving grace for Japheth? And what has the church lost in its Gentile character that has rejected its Jewish origins or its Hebraic origins that must be restored for the church to be the church? And ironically, not only to bless Israel, but move it to jealousy by that very same thing. So, bless this sharing, Lord, and bring a dimension because of it that would give us a more complete comprehension.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. In this book of Life Together, he has a chapter called The Day with Others, and in it he talks about prayer, he talks about devotion, he talks about daily Bible reading.

He takes up these majoring in the minors, we would say. Where is the weighty last days, radical things that we look for that would make a book distinguished? This book is classic, and yet it's in the minor things. How do you conduct a devotional life? What attitude ought you to have to the scriptures? Do you celebrate and esteem what you hear coming out of the mouth of a brother that is not some heavy profundity, but just a word, just an observation, just his own thought, just his own prayer? I gave a message in Russia, the first of a series of meetings with ministers.

We went to this city near Siberia for this purpose, for a series of meetings for ministers. After this first meeting, they never came to another one, I was forsaken and abandoned, contemptuously, because what the Lord gave me to open with is Paul's statement, and where was it in the first? Titus, or not Ephesians, one of the lesser books, the epistolary. Thessalonians, or Titus, or Timothy, it's in Timothy.

Paul's counsel about how the church ought to regard widows and slaves. What a minor note of all the profound things that could be spoken of, last day's truth. The Lord gives me to begin with that.

It was a majoring in the minors, and it was completely aroused the contempt of these ministers. You know what they wanted? Church growth methodologies coming from America to promote their ministries, their churches. And here's a guy speaking about Paul's attitude toward slaves.

His counsel toward slaves who had come into the faith. What possible application could that have for us? And so when I came home, I think it was the very first message I spoke at home. Remember, I said, here's a message that the Lord gave me that was completely aroused, and I shared with our fellowship.

When I finished, you could have heard the proverbial pin drop. The minor thing had become major. It was major because it was minor.

It was a more profound insight into the genius of Paul as apostle than considering Ephesians 3.10 and his heaviest observations of the mysteries of the faith. That this little minuscule hole that had to do with the issue of slaves and widows, he tells us what a true widow is. We didn't know that there is such a thing as true or false widows.

But in Paul's apostolic reckoning, there is. It's what their attitude is toward God. It was an insight in that little hole that was of remarkable magnitude.

The little things are the issue. Like martyrdom is not what you do or how you respond in that final moment in which your life is taken. Martyrdom is the sum of all the moments that have preceded it.

The small moments are martyr moments like with anger and the various issues that come up in the life. So listen to Bonhoeffer on the minor theme of reading scripture. Consecutive reading of biblical books forces everyone who wants to hear to put himself or allow himself to be found where God has acted once and for all for the salvation of men.

We become a part of what once took place for our salvation. Forgetting and losing ourselves, we too pass through the Red Sea, through the desert, across the Jordan, and into the promised land. With Israel, we fall into doubt and unbelief and through punishment and repentance experience again God's help and faithfulness.

Does that need to be read again? I will. What he's saying is God puts before us as believers, and especially Gentile believers, the supreme privilege of a vicarious identification with the subject of the

scriptures, namely God's redemptive work toward, through, and in Israel. That the genius of God is revealed in his activity toward Israel, both in judgment and forgiveness, in everything.

So there's a way that you can read that and note with interest and have some minor value, but what he's campaigning for is that the scriptures are God's door into vicarious identification. If somebody has the dictionary on the table, look up the word vicarious. I've used it now several times.

The big green book. Give it to Simon. Because if we miss that word, we miss the whole thing.

Let me read this again. Reading it carefully and slowly. Consecutive reading of biblical books.

What does that mean? You do not play spiritual roulette. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. What's God's scripture for today? And the remarkable thing is how often that scripture is appropriate.

But however much the Lord might be gracious in giving us something of value in playing spiritual roulette, the real object as believers is a systematic, consistent reading of the scriptures. And reading it in a particular way so as to enter into the experience of that which is being described. And I noticed when Tom used 1 Corinthians 10 last night, I was reminded, Paul begins by saying, now remember, as your ancestors did, that they passed through the sea and the cloud unto Moses.

Your ancestors? Who's he talking to? Jews? He's talking to Greeks in Corinth. And he's saying that Moses and the Israel that went through the sea and the cloud are their ancestors. Hey, where's this guy coming from? Come on, get real.

That is real. They're your ancestors. And unless you see it that way and enter into their experience, you're missing a great deal and remaining Gentile-ized when God wants to break us up.

You know that in the Passover, when it's enacted in the Jewish home, the youngest son asks the four questions, the fear manashtana. Excuse my pronunciation. Why on this day do we recline when on other days we eat erect? Why on this day do we eat bitter herbs when in other days we don't? Why on this day? He asked four prominent questions so that the father in answering them gives the story of the Passover and rehearses the children in what was the experience of their ancestors.

And then in Jewish tradition, there's the wise son who receives the benefit. There's the young son, the immature son. But the wicked son is the one who says, what has this got to do with me? In Jewish tradition, it's called wicked.

So that's the obverse of what this brother is saying of how we need to identify with our ancestors. You're privileged. You have Abraham for your father.

In the other book that I have with me, I received yesterday, interestingly, also a German scholar, German theologian speaking about the Hebrew inheritance. What a paradox. And there he talks about our Abrahamitic inheritance.

Okay, Simon, vicarious. Vicarious, acting for another, filling the place of another, substituted in the place of another as a vicarious sacrifice, vicariously in the place of another by substitution. Okay.

I'll tell you what's happening to me as I'm reading now the episodes in the life of Jesus. If I had not mentioned this before, they have always been instructive. But now I'm seeing them not only as events that have actually taken place in history and time, but taken place for the reason that we might be instructed in

the last days, that the father in his great wisdom, who knows the end from the beginning, had and put before Jesus episodes that were valid in that time, but valid for all time so that we can enter into that and receive a value for the last days, because it was given to us through his experience when we receive it vicariously.

A wonderful example and a text that I enjoy using is Mark 9 of the inability of the disciples to cast the demon spirit out of that boy who wallowed in fire and in water. And that when Jesus said, how long has he suffered this? The father says, since childhood, since infancy. You get the impression that this is not just a little freaky accident that came when they descended from the mount of transfiguration, but a calculated event that is symbolic and fraught with great meaning.

For if the powers of darkness were not just merely harassing this child since infancy or almost since the inception of his life, their intention is more than harassment, but destruction. The father says, so as to destroy him. Well, who is the son then? He's the symbol of Israel himself.

And what shall be the last days frenzy of the powers of darkness to take this Israel when it's down and frothing at the mouth in its own fits the consequence of its own sins and take it like a rag doll and shake the stuffings out of it until it's finished. And that's what that spirit did. Even when Jesus commanded to come out of him, he didn't come out without one last spiteful attempt, not just to harass, but to get the life out of him that when he was, when he let him go, they said that boy's dead.

He's a corpse. Jesus had not only to deliver him, he had to raise him. And the disciples could not do it.

Though he had given them the authority to confound the powers of darkness, and they came back boasting, even the demons are obedient to us, but yet they did not have the authority for this demon, for this was ultimate. And that's a picture of the last days. And so they said, why could we not cast this out? Because this kind, this ultimate kind cometh not out, but by fasting and by prayer.

So evidently there was a dimension lacking in the disciples that Jesus possessed, not because he was the son of God and retained his deity, but because he had a relationship with the father through a daily communion in prayer that was more than just plying his petitions. And in that communion, something is taken into our spirit of the one with whom we are in communion, that is the very substance of himself, his majesty and his authority. And when Jesus came to the point of confrontation and collision, that was manifest in his speaking, come out of him and do not enter him again.

So that's a statement for us. We're going to face those demons in the last days, shaking the stuffings out of Jews. And unless we have the authority comparable to Jesus, we will fail like the disciples before us.

And the issue is not turning up the amplifiers, but prayer and fasting. But prayer in dimensions that we have not known because we are so utilitarian that all we do is give God our petitions, help me in this, do this, this is coming up, I need this and that. But we don't linger beyond that and stay in the place of communion, prayer as communion, for that's where the substance and the reality of very God is transmitted by those who will linger in his presence even when the presence is not felt.

So I'm just giving one example of how an episode in the life of Jesus is the most remarkable instruction for us upon whom the ends of the age have come. If we will receive that and enter in, you know what we need to do? We need to feel the mortification and the embarrassment of the disciples who could not cast it out. And that after coming down from the mount and seeing Jesus transfigured and hearing the voice of the

father and they could not bring that sense of glory and majesty to the point of collision.

Would we have done better? We need to see ourselves with Peter denying Christ before the cock crows three times, with curses and with oaths. See, this is what he's talking about, how to come into the scripture if we are to receive the benefit by consecutive reading and not spiritual roulette of biblical books forces everyone who wants to hear to put himself or allow himself to be found where God has acted once and for all for the salvation of men. You want to be where God has acted.

You want to be at the base of the mount that was wreathed in fire where Moses went up and came down with the commandments. You want to be dancing around the golden calf, nakedly and reveling in the idolatrous fit to which Israel had fallen. You want to put your sword on the side and go in and out of the camp and let every man slay his father, his brother and his friend and that they be consecrated as the priests of God.

For the word consecration means having your hands full of blood. If that will not transform a believer, transfigure his life and bring dimensions of depth, seriousness and the reality of God, how far God will go in requiring of men judgment, how far men will fall. And this is our inheritance.

You can read it as one way or you can read it as another. There's reading and reading. There's faith and faith.

There's prayer and prayer. There's love and love. There's ministry and ministry.

So the world has not fitted us to read like that. It has only taught us how to read *Gone with the Wind* or *Tarzan and the Apes* or a manual on how to put your spark plugs in and do the timing. The world is not teaching us how to read.

Reading is a phenomenon. Speaking is a phenomenon. And we need to esteem all of these functions that constitute our humanity.

And if we're reading just like a bunch of mindless blah blah blah blah and speaking equally as mindlessly, our humanity will become depraved rather than God-like. So we need to read as putting ourselves in and allowing ourselves to be found where God has acted. We become a part of what once took place for our salvation.

That's the vicarious. Forgetting and losing ourselves. What is he saying here? That we want to get away from this terrible, haunting preoccupation with ourselves where we love our love of God rather than God himself? One of the ways that God provides is the scriptures.

When you come into the great saga, S-A-G-A, of God's great redemptive sweep through the history of Israel, where do you have time or even disposition to contemplate yourself and your spirituality and where you are? It dismisses even that kind of consideration. You're brought into another atmosphere. Forgetting and losing ourselves, we too pass through the Red Sea, through the desert, across the Jordan into the Promised Land.

How would you like to put your feet in the Jordan and see it part and remain there until all Israel passes through with its women and children slow and plodding while that bank of water that has parted when your feet went in is pulsating and threatening to break at any moment and to overwhelm you and cast you away into death? You want to be a priest? First one in, last one out? You can be it in the book of Joshua. Don't

read it about them, read it about you. Forgetting and losing ourselves, we too pass through the Red Sea, through the desert, across the Jordan and into the Promised Land.

How should we talk about coming into Zion? How do we sing that? Da-da-da to Zion, da-da-da to Zion. Let's go out to Zion, the city of the Lord. We can sing it while they're singing and singing.

Just as there's reading and reading, just as there's speaking and speaking. We can sing it with a little bit of gusto, but to sing it with a full comprehension has to come from an identification with those who have come into the land of promise. For that's our destiny also.

And our destiny will be heightened and made more real because of our identification with those who have preceded us and whose experience is transcribed or written for our admonition. All this is not mere reverie, but holy, godly reality. In fact, I'll go further than Bonhoeffer.

It's reality itself. How can there be reality if we have turned our back on this record? If we have only been nominal and have only done it under obligation, what reality then can we have in the present if we have not fully appropriated the reality that is the past and that has been written for us? This is reality. How God has acted is reality.

We are torn out of our own existence and set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth. Time out. A moment's reverence and silence for such a statement.

We're torn out of, and it's the only thing that will tear you and separate you out from your own existence as Gentiles. Dear Saints, it's a fearful thing to look into the face of an unregenerate Gentile. Remember what I said in that shopping mall in that city in Germany where I was invited to speak at that evangelization.

Your faces do condemn you. Nothing has changed. And I owe it away from brutality and murder.

It's there. You've never been redeemed, and nor has the history of the Holocaust and your horrors in any way affected you. You've not read them.

You've not considered them, and therefore you're equally capable now for what you performed then. That's why Jesus could say to those who were garnishing the tombs of the prophets, as your fathers did, so do you also. Nothing has changed.

You've not benefited from the past. You've rejected the past, and therefore your capability for cruelty remains. An unregenerate Gentile is a fearful thing, especially the German and the Japanese forms.

But I would suspect anywhere. What have we performed in this country in the South? How many black men have been lynched and burned? And how far back do we have to go when that black man was towed behind a pickup truck by a bunch of white roughnecks who just towed him through the streets and out into the suburbs until his head rolled off his body and had a blast doing it? There's nothing more fearful than unregenerate men and no greater provision of God than the history of his dealings with Israel, that they might be tempered and sanctified and be brought into a Hebraic place. And don't think that Jews are not any less capable of the same cruelty and the same brutality if they themselves are not benefited by the experience of their own ancestors.

If they're only looking at this as Bible stories at best and have rejected it as myths and fables, they're losing the tempering benefit of their own history. And recent, the conduct of present Israel reveals it. We

are torn out of our own existence.

And I'm not condemning Gentile. This is not a Jew speaking in some superior way. But what are pagans? What are those who have burned their children and taken the hearts out of their enemies and eaten them and the vile, filthy practices of men, their brutality against what is created in God's image because they have not the sanctifying influence of God.

It's a blessing to bring to the most remote tribes on the earth the history of Israel and the God of Israel. For only in his relationship with them is he revealed as God. And in the absence of that, in whom shall they believe? But their animistic spirits and the Baal worship and goddesses and all of the other filthy things that have to do with temple prostitution and so on.

Their God dealt with us. Somebody may want to read Hosea, chapter 12, verse 4. Anybody quick to turn to that? Hosea, chapter 12, verse 4. And a remarkable statement that when God dealt with Jacob in Jacob's flight in the wilderness, he was dealing with us. Anybody have that? He struggled with the angel and overcame him.

He wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there. Okay.

What version of the Bible is that? NIV. NIV. Okay.

Anybody got the King James? It will say, he met him at Bethel and talked with us there. Yeah. Read that.

This is the New King James, but it still says it. Yes, he struggled with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought favor from him.

He found him in Bethel, and there he spoke to us. I'll bet you that when the NIV translators came to that, they said, well, of course, that's a physical impossibility. How could he speak with us when he's dealing with Jacob at Bethel? Because of their literal mindedness and not understanding the mystery of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer sees, they altered it and made it grammatically and rationally more acceptable.

But I'll go for the King James and the New King James. There he spoke with us. Why? Because we're Jacobs ourselves.

Because we're supplanters ourselves. Because we're wheeler dealers and schemers and taking advantage. We're all Jacobs until we're Israel.

So he spoke to us at Bethel. There God dealt with us, and there he still deals with us, our needs and our sins in judgment and grace. It is not that God is the spectator and sharer of our present life, however important that is, but rather that we are the reverent listeners and participants in God's action in the sacred story, the history of the Christ on earth.

That story, that history, I wrote here in the margin, is stronger and the only antidote to the power of personal or national subjectivity. How do you avoid becoming nationalistic and wallowing in your Germanic pride or your French pride or your English pride or your white pride? It's by coming into this account and being participant in God's action in the sacred story. There's a power in God's history with Israel in judgment and mercy that breaks the power and exceeds the influence that comes to us in the world through race, through nationality, through gender, and through any other kind of thing in which we would find our identity.

If our identity is not here, then we'll be subject to having our identity formed in the world and then be nationalistic, proud, and all the kinds of things that we see in the world and in men and in the church itself. Because though it has this heritage, it has not invested itself in it and received the benefit and the power that would break the influence of culture. The Germans were all too German.

Shakespeare said, human, all too human. English, all too English. French, all too French.

When I was in Scotland, Edinburgh, I think it was, there was a mosaic in some national monument for World War I, a beautiful mosaic, I mean, all along, all over the wall, showing soldiers prostrate on the battlefield or holding up the great, what is the English flag called? Union Jack. Ours are stars and stripes. Union Jack.

The Union Jack. And behind the Union Jack and the soldiers falling or dying or being brave is Jesus at the cross. I thought to myself, what the heck is this? Excuse my language.

How does he get figured into this, factored into this, as if his whole purpose is to subliminally support nationalist expression on the battlefield with the Union Jack and the bravery of men and the national purposes, national, national, nationalism, as if Jesus is a supplement to nations. It's a miscarriage. It's a caricature.

There ought to be a national protest that God should be sublimated into the national aspirations. And what nation has that not been? When the Germans went forth in World War I, who blessed them but their priests and their ministers? And so it is in every nation and our own because we have not appropriated what God has given us in the holy, sacred scriptures that would have broken the power of these identities. What has God not given nations? Yes, they're necessary in their structure to provide coherence, peace, and stability so that the church might function in the redemptive purposes of God.

But they are not given as a basis for the loyalty and the identification of men greater than that to God, for that will destroy them. And history has proved that. So God's antidote against that, against that nationalist subjectivity is our participation in God's actions with Israel.

It had to come in the experience of a nation chosen for it. But for us to forfeit that identification with that nation is to forfeit God as God. That's not Bonhoeffer, that's Kat speaking.

Did you hear that? To forfeit that identification is to forfeit God as God. God of necessity had to choose a nation in order to explicate and to reveal and make himself known in his acts toward them. And if we forsake that statement and that revelation, how then shall we know that God? But if we're proud Gentiles and don't want to make that identification with Jews or their history, and in fact for some Gentile Christians, they don't even want to come so much to the acknowledgement of the Jewishness of Jesus.

Even that is too much a bone in their throats. They cannot humble themselves even to acknowledge that the Lord, in his manhood, is a son of Abraham and a son of David. That somehow, that's a wrong, that's a misrepresentation.

They don't want to see Jesus as being Jewish. Well, what will we say of the whole generation that came to church with the New Testament and maybe the Book of Psalms? And the Book of Psalms only as a songbook, not to bring us into the experience of Israel, but to have an application in another separated way. What a contempt for the Old Testament that we don't find it necessary, that it's old, passé, finished.

What percentage of its prophecies are yet to be fulfilled? And what descriptions of God by the psalmist, by the prophets, that no contemporary and even New Testament writer can exceed? I'm not talking about Jewish roots in the way that it's presently being sought. There's something in that that, though it's near, it's not quite the same as what I think Bonhoeffer is wanting to express and what's in my own heart. Jewish roots as a curiosity and as a source of new kinds of pride is the opposite side of the wrong coin.

Now I've become Judaized. Now I'm Jewish, I'm a Christian. Now I'm a Jew.

It's exalting the wrong thing and playing upon Jewish culture, wearing the yarmulke and the prayer shawl and taking things from synagogue practices as if they have some kind of sacrosanct power, when all it is is the culture of a phenomenon out of exile. The word itself, synagogue, is Greek, and we're exalting the wrong thing. Bonhoeffer is speaking about something else, something Hebraic.

And the cultural thing is much more easy to pursue than this. But the issue is not what's most convenient or what's easiest, but what is true and what is God wanting, why has he given us this remarkable record. And only insofar as we are there is God with us today also.

I don't know if I'd go so far as Bonhoeffer, but I think it needs to be heard. What a remarkable man. Only insofar as we are there in the history of Israel's past do we have a present today, a real present, and that we can be a real testimony and stand for something that the world so desperately needs because it is too thoroughly Gentile-ized and brutal.

A complete reversal occurs. It's not in our life that God's help and presence must still be proved. Rather, God's presence and help have been already demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ.

If he had said Israel, he would have said the same thing. But the life of Jesus Christ, the life of Israel, is one and the same subject. It is, in fact, more important for us to know what God did to Israel through his son.

Here he says it. He equates Israel and son as referring to the same reality, to his son Jesus Christ, than to seek what God intends for us today. More important to know what God did than to know that which is intended for us today.

This guy is really going out on a limb, so underlining and so emphatically stating how important it is to lay hold of this heritage. Because if you don't have it, then whatever we have for today is going to be necessarily corrupted. It will not have it in its fullness and clarity and purity because that would have come to us from our embrace of the past.

So there would be a distortion, even in the way in which we apprehend what God intends for us today and the way in which we would act it out. And, in fact, that may well be the statement of the Church. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I shall die.

The fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I too shall be raised in the last day. Our truest salvation is external to our souls. I find no salvation in my life history but only the history of Jesus Christ.

Only he who allows himself to be found in Jesus Christ or in the history of Israel, one and the same, in his incarnation, his cross and his resurrection, is with God and God with him. And you know what? The life of Bonhoeffer is the testimony to this truth. The man died as a martyr.

He lived heroically. He opposed the false thing that rose in Germany as Nazism in a nation that had separated itself from its Hebraic roots. Nietzsche and other of the German philosophers and ideologists were offended by that content.

They wanted a Christianity more in keeping with German national life. And the thing that most offended them about Paul was Paul's references to that Hebraic past. And they saw Paul as the enemy.

They could take Jesus, if he's not Jewish, and somehow fit him in to their German national life as a kind of Christianity appropriate to Germany. But Paul spoils it. Paul necessarily brings them into the inheritance of the past.

Paul speaks to the Greeks in Corinth about their ancestors as if Moses in that generation belongs and is part with the present German. They did not like that Hebraicizing. You know why? Because it threatens that which is God.

You cannot be an imperialist nation and have a history with Israel because of necessity that brings a tempering, a brokenness, a humility, a contrition if you have made their history your own. But if you have voided it, then you can go on with your national ambition and have your ministers and pay their salaries as Germany does. The state church pays the salary of its ministers and provides their retirement as well as their education in universities, state universities.

It's a system that has voided this past. And yet the remarkable... Who's talking to us? A German who was educated in German universities and was a professor there and learned his theology in those places. It's a remarkable, mind-boggling thing.

So even within German Christianity, there's a lying and a striving that the greatest scholarship in Old Testament and in the Psalms is German. And the other book that I have, if I don't read it today, some other time, another German author and a student of Calbot. And who is Calbot but a German, a Swiss German? How much of the Jesus that we know when we cite the name is the Jesus that is Jesus? How much is our own construct? How much have we omitted distinctive elements in the constitution of the God-man that is Hebraic that would give us the truest statement of what he is, which we so desperately need if we have omitted Jesus as a Jew, as the ultimate Hebrew and the Semite of the Semites.

And that's what the church has either consciously or unconsciously done. And therefore, we need as consciously to retrieve it. If it went out by a conscious omission, it will be retrieved by a conscious seeking.

So we need to ask ourselves, what is the Jesus or who is the Jesus that we celebrate, whose name we invoke and upon whom we call and to whom we pray and relate? How authentic an appropriation do we have of this Jesus unless we see him in the context of Israel as Israel's awaited Messiah and deliverer and coming king? Are we going to resurrect or obtain the truth without effort? This requires a digging in. This requires an immersion in the scripture, a real comparing of scripture with scripture, a real wrestling to get the content. Casual reading won't do it, but systematic and consistent reading and study will.

But we're slothful and lazy and too casual and therefore we've lost much of this treasure. We must learn to know the scriptures again as the reformers and our fathers knew them. We must not grudge the time and the work that it takes.

We must know the scriptures first and foremost for the sake of our continuing salvation. But there are other reasons that make this requirement exceedingly urgent. One who will not learn to handle the Bible

for himself is not an evangelical Christian.

That's going to take time. It's going to take leisure. We have to make time for this as high priority and not just a mechanical morning going through so many verses or chapters that you have done your obligatory religious requirement.

Stay with one psalm, but stay with it. You can always tell an immature preacher, unseasoned or shallow, by how many texts they employ in the giving of one message. This has been my observation.

Whenever I hear a man going through half a dozen texts to fill the hour, I'm bored, I'm not engaged. But give me a man who stays with one text or one supplementary text and gets into it and opens that and digs out that truth and takes the word and opens the words and their meanings and the riches and the depths. How is it that we have one and we have the other? The guy who scrambles for a number of texts can do it maybe in a half hour.

The man who speaks to us out of eight texts has spent hours, hours, hours immersed in that text. He won't even turn to a commentary until he has first exhausted every meaning that he himself can obtain before God by staying with the text. Then, having exhausted that, then he'll pick up, who's the great comprehensive guy? Matthew Henry.

See what Matthew Henry says over that text or this one or that one and then taking and internalizing that. This takes time, it takes leisure. So I want to read you a quote on leisure where leisure is not a quantity of time but a quality of spirit.

Only in the ambience of leisure does God know he is listened to seriously. How you give God time, how you make available your leisure indicates to God your seriousness about him and the issue is not chronology or the clock ticking away that you gave 15 minutes to a half hour. The issue is a quality of spirit.

How do you attend to the Lord in the use of that time? So sacred history, here are my marginal comments, are itself a sacrament for life. God revealed in his acts. How else shall we know what is righteousness? How else shall we know what is humility? It's one thing to go to a dictionary but it's another thing to learn it by the acts of God, by what he reveals in himself.

And yet, says Israel, sought to know his acts but Moses his way. It's not just the activity but what is revealed in it of the character of God, his trademark. What does he leave of his distinct sense in what he does? How shall we know that? We've got a whole book called the Bible and Bonhoeffer is the statement of what he's writing.

He testified to it with his life. Have I bored you guys with this? Let's pray, you can join me. We have about ten minutes before we'll hear the bell ring.

So Lord, I trust I've not missed you, my God. This choice time, of all the good things that could have been spoken, that could have been addressed in the way in which it could have been employed, was there something, my God, in your heart that had to be expressed this morning in this way? If so, I ask you to bless that sharing, keep it alive in the memory, in the heart and spirit of these children, my God, and give us a whole new attitude toward your word, toward the remarkable collection that the scriptures are, of your great acts toward Israel. And Jesus, as a son of Israel, coming out of that context, the promised Messiah, and reflecting the whole tradition, quoting scripture himself, to verify himself before his own people.

My God, we know that there have been dimensions lost because of the arrogance and pride of the church that does not want to humble itself to recognize, let alone submit to, its own inheritance, but sought to see itself as a novel innovation, beginning with Pentecost, and losing the whole precedent before it, without which even Pentecost itself is not understood. For what is Pentecost but itself a high feast day in the history of Israel? So, my God, bring this lost dimension back, bring this quotient back. For it makes the church the church.

It brings vital dimensions, without which the church itself is gentile, mechanical, a Jacob. Its methods, how to, step one, step two, programs, a man-pleasing thing, it has lost its distinctive. And so we ask this Lord, bring the church itself into the tent of Shem.

Let it humble itself and bow and enter and abide there and receive the benefit that makes the church the church. So we thank you, Lord. Precious God on high, forgive us our laziness, our sloth, our lack of right priority, our misuse of time, our unwillingness to study, for study is a labor, and we're too lazy to perform it.

We never crack the dictionary, we don't look up key words, we let them slide. We're minimal, Lord, and therefore we have lost much, and it shows. So, my God, forgive us that slack, that we have not given you the devotion and attention you deserve in your word, and grant us a new vigor, out of your life, a strength, where you can feel the thing ebbing out of you as it makes its demand.

German scholars are exceptional, for they have the tenacity and the grit to stay with the subject, and their footnotes alone would exhaust us and leave us limp and hanging on the ropes. But they could not conceive of true scholarship without detailed examination and showing the source from which they're quoting or citing in footnote after footnote after footnote. It's a labor, and it's a labor of love, and it's one that we have not entered into as lazy, slothful Americans, and have lost much.

So, my God, stir us afresh, we pray, by this morning's exhortation about your word, the history of yourself in Israel. And we thank and give you praise in Yeshua's holy name.

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