

# A People Under the Word

by Richard E. Bieber

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*Richard E. Bieber's sermon emphasizes the necessity of being a people under the living word of God to sustain true revival and avoid the pitfalls of legalism and ideology.*

**Duration:** 20:47

**Scripture:** John 6:63-64, John 6:66-67, Acts 2:36-42

**Topics:** "Word Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power of God's spoken word. He references the stories of Jesus raising the dead with a simple command and highlights how the revival of faith can continue if people are willing to listen to God's word and stay under its influence. The preacher urges the congregation to pray for God to reveal any substitutes they have been relying on instead of His pure word. He encourages them to confess and speak the truth they have found in Jesus Christ, overcoming fear and self-consciousness. The sermon concludes with the reminder that Jesus is always present with His people through His spoken word.

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## Transcript

A passage from John chapter 6, part of which we sing every Sunday between the second and third lesson. And that thing that we sing is really appropriate. It comes down to what I'd really like to talk about today.

From John chapter 6, starting at verse 63. It is the spirit, Jesus is speaking, it is the spirit that gives life. The flesh is of no avail.

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe. For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe.

And who it was that should betray him. And he said, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer went with him.

Jesus said to the twelve, will you also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. At one time or another, almost everyone here, no doubt, has either seen or been part of a revival.

I mean a real revival. I'm not talking about getting a series of meetings together and getting in an outside speaker and arranging special music and programming the thing to come up to a climax where everybody is supposed to recommit themselves again, which may have its value. But I'm talking about something which takes place at God's initiative, takes place beginning from God's side, God's speech, his spirit moves.

And under the power of a living word from God, people begin to repent and change their lives. Always with this comes a burst of enthusiasm and praise and generosity and joy. Other things are forgotten.

Other commitments and engagements are dropped so that we can all come together and drink from this new spring which God has opened up in our midst. Of course, every aspect of our lives comes under the influence of this. Relationships are healed.

Sins are put away. Habits are changed. And for a while, the revival seems to roll on by its own momentum.

And nobody even stops to think about how can we keep this thing going, but with the passing of time. It seems that the fires of this thing begin to cool down. And some of the people who were drawn in start to drift away.

And the enthusiasm that was so spontaneous in the beginning now starts to get forced. It's like we're sitting around trying to keep our spirits up and we still say, Praise the Lord, but it's like, you know, you're trying to get me going and I'm trying to get you going. When it comes to that point, the revival has arrived at a critical phase where it could go off in any one of three directions.

One of the directions, you could say, would be right on. The first is that it might move off into the way of a cult. Now instead of a fresh living word from God, it substituted the personality of the leader or some religious ideology formulated by the ruling group within this movement.

Not all cults are built around personalities. They're often built around an ideology. The Bible is still used.

The same songs are sung. The worship remains quite the same as what it was. And yet there is a shift.

The source of its life is no longer a living word from God, but now it's a human personality. Or the revival might take the way of the religious club where everybody still kind of stays together. But the thing that holds them together now is no longer a burning word from God.

The word has been hardened down now into a legalism to which everybody in the group pays lip service while their thoughts go after other things. And now the joy and the enthusiasm and the generosity and the thoughtfulness of other people and the mercy and the forgiveness and all those things which are so much a part of the revival disappear. And in their place is this hard legalism and all the hypocrisy that goes with it.

Or the revival might continue to grow and increase even though it goes through changes under the power of a living word that never stops coming. There may be inner changes and outer changes and pressures of all kinds that tend to change the form of this thing. But it continues to go on and the revival will never stop as long as there are people who are hearing and responding to a living word from God.

One Sunday in March, ten years ago, some of you here will remember that a revival broke out among us here. And very quickly all kinds of changes began to take place in our lives. The worship remained pretty

much the same.

But underneath what appeared to be relative order was an influx of obvious life that drew people together and then sent them out with a witness that bore fruit. Families were healed. Lives were healed.

And this thing had continued down through these ten years to today. But again, today, and this has probably happened a number of times in the past ten years, there are signs that would indicate that once again the revival has arrived at a kind of a critical phase where it could go any one of these three ways. What's taking place among us, and it's important for us to see this, could very easily go the way of the cult.

And people might say, well, that's hardly likely here. But don't kid yourself. What could happen, at least, is that we could take the insights which God has given us here and formulate them into an ideology that becomes very rigid and then begin to make everybody conform to it in subtle ways and start eliminating the people who don't conform.

It's a shortcut to power, but it's the end of the presence of God. Or it could go the way of the religious club. Instead of continuously hungering and thirsting for a living word from God, that word that kept us alive and drew us together and kept us alive some more and sent us forth now is hardened down and it becomes a legalism.

And this legalism becomes the means by which we can continue to go through our old routine. But while we're going through our old routine, our hearts are chasing after the cares and the riches and the pleasures of this life, and the outsiders might not even notice a change for quite a while. But if we're at all honest, we will see that the heart of the revival is now beginning to turn to stone.

The joy, the liberty, the forgiveness, the compassion toward other people, the mercy, the desire, the childlike love for Jesus and the desire to do his will now are replaced by a legalism, and with that legalism always comes a good dose of hypocrisy. Or the revival could continue and grow and develop under the power of a word which continues to move. And the best example of that would of course be what we see in what took place on the day of Pentecost and what followed.

What took place on Pentecost was obviously a revival in the right sense of the word. God brought something to life, and the source and center of that revival was the living word from God. The Spirit moved upon the believers, and their tongues were loose, and their mouths were open, and they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance, and what they spoke was God's word, a word from God.

Peter stood up and began to speak, and undoubtedly was himself astonished at what started coming out of his mouth. And the multitude that came together recognized, at least many of them recognized, that this was a word right from God. And they submitted to that word.

They put themselves under its authority, and their lives were changed. Peter's sermon ends like this. Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know assuredly that God has made him, both Lord and Christ, this Jesus, whom you crucified.

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, to everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. And he testified with many other words, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this

crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day 3,000 souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Very soon, this revival began to experience outward threats. Peter and John are put in prison, they're arrested and put in prison for preaching the word.

They're released the next day with a command not to preach anymore. They go back to the brothers and sisters, and everybody prays, and listens to their prayer. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed in the name of thy holy servant Jesus.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness. The word was still the center of their life. Then came internal difficulties, very quickly, and that will always happen.

There came tension between the Hebrews and the Greeks, because the Greek widows weren't getting a fair share in the daily distribution of food. And they complained, and the apostles conceived that this unfair thing, this tension, is threatening the power of the word in their midst. If this isn't straightened out and made right, the word is under threat.

And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit, and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

Again, the word is still central. One of these seven, who is supposed to be serving tables, you know, preaches the word, as they all do. Everybody does.

And he gives himself stone to death. And from the stoning of Stephen erupts a severe and violent persecution. The church still hangs together under the power of the word.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul was consenting to his death. And on that day, a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul laid waste the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

The word continued to remain central. The revival went on. It went from strength to strength.

Because they responded to the word that was in their midst. They conformed their lives to it. They went out and both lived it and proclaimed it.

Jesus says, Lo, I am with you always. Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst. How is he in our midst? He is in our midst as the word of God.

He is the living word. He. He's the one who speaks.

He's the shepherd who makes his voice known to his sheep. The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life. We never have to worry for a half a second about whether or not Jesus will speak to us.

He will speak. He speaks today. He'll speak tomorrow.

He goes with us through the very fires of that world, instructing us and teaching us in the way that we should go, guiding us with his very eye. The issue is not, will he speak to us? The issue is, will we, in fact, put our lives under the authority of the word that he does speak? And that word is not just the dead letter of scripture, which the Pharisees dragged around with them, killing people's faith, intimidating them with their rules and regulations, and distorting the God of Israel. But the word we're talking about is the spirit of God coming up through scripture, taking the veil off our minds, setting us free, conforming us to the image of Christ, loosing our tongues so that we can speak.

Jesus is the word among us. The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life, he says. He who abides in me, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it will be done for you.

He or she who has my commandments, my words, and keeps them, he it is who loves me. He who hears my word and believes on him who sent me has eternal life and will not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life. The revival, which is all something which God initiates and preserves, will go on and it will go from strength to strength if we are willing to be a people under the word.

Which means just a few simple things. To be a people under the word means that we open our lives to that word. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life, but they don't do us any good if we don't open our hearts to them. There has to be a holding still, a receiving, a listening, an opening of the heart. We have to come to the place where we realize that we can't even, we can't get through a single day without hearing something from our shepherd.

Even if it means taking a snatch from a song, or a little piece of the sermon in the mouth, or something from Isaiah, meditating on that and carrying it with us in our hearts and minds. And along with that often comes the just holding still in utter silence before God. We talk too much.

We need to say praise the Lord, but we also need to shut up and listen. To become silent before God until the Spirit can speak to us as He spoke to Elijah on Horeb in the voice of Isaiah. And having heard a word from God, the next thing we always have to do is take that word, grab hold of it, and incorporate it in our living.

What is faith but to make the word of God actual in our lives? Not just hearing it, it's doing it. Not everybody who says, Lord, Lord, is going to enter the kingdom of God. Not everyone who can quote the Bible from cover to cover.

It's a matter of taking the word and making it actual in our lives. For instance, Jesus declares us forgiven by His blood. Then how come we walk around with all this guilt? If there's something we need to repent from, and whoever does it, then let's repent.

If you probably leave this place today, let's repent. Kneel, fall on your face, do whatever you like, but repent. And then God help us to live as men and women who've been forgiven.

Jesus also commands us to forgive as we've been forgiven. Then how come we're walking around with all these grudges? Faith is to do the word. Lord, I got this grudge, I can't get it out of my head.

At least do that. Help me to get rid of it. Do something about it.

And we could go on and on. We know the things that God is telling us in our hearts to act on. Incorporate it.

Make it real. Turn it into flesh and blood. And finally, to be a people under the word is to confess the word.

Now Lord, behold their threat. And grant thy people to speak thy word with all boldness. Which is more than beating people over the head with Bible verses.

It's taking the word which God has spoken to us and dealt with us on. The things that God has shown us. The things we have seen and heard and bearing witness to them.

In whatever language, whatever way we have to say it. To speak from our hearts the truth that we have found in the person of Jesus Christ. God help us to get rid of our fear, our self-consciousness, and our self-righteousness, and our self-importance.

The word that we have heard from God. Whenever Jesus raised the dead, he did it by means of a spoken word. Young man, I say to you, arise.

Little girl, get up. Lazarus, come forth. He brought us to life by means of a word.

He keeps keeping us alive by means of a spoken word to us. The revival will go on and it will never stop. If we are willing to listen to that word and stay under it.

Let's pray. Pray Heavenly Father that you deal with us, each of us, individually and all of us corporately. That today the spirit in his power and his light and his wisdom would point out to us those things that we have allowed ourselves to get tangled up with, that have been substitutes for your pure word.

Those places where we have been trying to suck life and have been really taking death into our very spirits.

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