

(Church Leadership) 2. Sharpening Our Sword

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of sharpening our spiritual swords through wisdom and reliance on the Holy Spirit for effective church leadership.

Duration: 58:31

Scripture: 1 Samuel 13:19

Topics: "Effective Preaching", "Church Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of delivering the word of God with clarity and effectiveness. He shares a personal anecdote about a preacher who would bang the table and shout when he reached a weak point in his sermon. The preacher cautions against mistaking yelling and screaming for the fervency of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus did not raise his voice or shout when proclaiming the word. He highlights the need for careful planning and preparation in delivering sermons, encouraging the use of written points for better organization and effectiveness. The preacher also references biblical passages that describe Jesus as a gentle and effective preacher, using his mouth as a sharp sword to deliver the word of God.

Transcript

I want to read a verse in 1 Samuel chapter 13. The Old Testament was written for our instruction. We are not under the old covenant, but the Old Testament of the Bible, we can learn lots of things from.

The enemies of God's people, the Philistines and others are a picture of the devil and his hosts that fight against us today. Pharaoh, Goliath are all pictures of Satan. We know Melchizedek is a picture of Christ and of us, who are junior priests.

So, we must study the Old Testament like that. There are spiritual lessons for us to learn. So, 1 Samuel 13, verse 19 to 22.

No blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, because the Philistines said, otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears. That means the Philistines made sure that there will be no blacksmiths, got rid of all of them. No.

No, I don't want to spoon feed you as babies, but you can understand what does that mean for us today. So, all Israel had to go down to the Philistines, if they wanted to shop in their ploughshare or their mattock

or their axe or their hoe. And there was a charge for each of these things.

Verse 21. And then, what happened on the day of battle? Verse 22. On the day of battle, there was no sword or spear found in the hands of any of the Israelites.

Except Saul and Jonathan had. What a clever tactic of the Philistines. What is the use of having 500,000 soldiers, none has got a sword.

These are the tactics of the enemy. And we find the devil has done the same thing in India. We know that the sword is the sword of the Holy Spirit, which is the word of God.

I don't mean just the Bible, I mean there are millions of Bibles in India, but they are not all swords. I don't mean just the Bible, I mean there are millions of Bibles in India, but they are not all swords. And there is a lot of difference between a blunt sword and a sharp sword.

The devil does so many things to make our effectiveness for Christ blunt. See, there is a verse in Ecclesiastes in chapter 10. Ecclesiastes chapter 10.

Verse 10. Please remember this verse all your life. Easy to remember.

Ecclesiastes, easy to remember because that's a book many people don't read. 10.10. 10 is easy to remember. Ecclesiastes 10.10. What does it say? If your axe is blunt, then you don't sharpen its edge.

You have to work very hard to cut down a tree or do anything with it. What does he mean, he says, by sharpening the edge? He says there, wisdom. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

See how Jesus used to solve problems with one shot, tree is down. He who is without sin among you, cast the first stone. How sharp that axe was.

But if an axe is blunt, we have to talk to them and say, brothers, don't you think it shouldn't be harassing a poor woman like this and all that type of stuff. Or another time, one axe. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

Finish. Wisdom has the advantage of success. You know what we need more than anything else? Wisdom.

You can have fantastic knowledge of the Bible. I know personally people who know, they can quote verses like anything. But they have no wisdom for their personal life.

Or no wisdom for their family life. And no wisdom in church matters. The brothers and sisters in the church don't look up to them.

They have no confidence in them. Because they seek to impose themselves on others. So, wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

So, that's what the Philistines realized. See how they planned long before the battle. And that in the time of battle, we may fight with these people six months from now.

Now itself we must prepare. Make sure their swords are all blunt. That even if they hit us with it, nothing will get cut.

Just a little pain, that's all. Not even blood will come. Because we got rid of all the blacksmiths.

Can you understand the application for India today? Why is it we hardly hear a message where the word of God is like a sharp sword? No, I'm not talking about the whip. People can use a whip and think that I'm using a sword. It's not shouting.

The Bible says about Jesus in Matthew 12, he did not raise his voice and shout. I'm always concerned about people who have to shout. Usually it's because the sword is blunt, they have to shout.

It says in Matthew 12, verse 18 and 19. Matthew 12, verse 18 and 19. Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my spirit on him and he will proclaim, we can say, my word to others. But when he proclaims my word, he will not proclaim it in such a way as if he's quarreling with people. You can preach in such a way where you're quarreling with people.

Why are you like this and why are you like that? Jesus wouldn't do that. He will not cry out. Why should he? The spirit is upon him.

The Holy Spirit is upon him. It says in Isaiah 49, God has made my mouth like a sharp sword. Why do you have to shout and shout and shout? That's because the sword is blunt.

In your packet, I give a little tract called, Jesus our example as a preacher. We hope we get it translated later on into Tamil and Malayalam. But I studied that subject nearly more than 40 years ago.

I don't remember exactly when, but more than 40 years ago. And I said, Lord, you are the greatest preacher that ever preached on this earth. I want to make my lifetime study of how you preached.

What you preached. And many things to whom you preached. So many things.

And I would encourage you to do that. If you want to be like Jesus as a preacher. Sure.

I mean, if God has not given you the gift of preaching, then you just need to see how Jesus lived. That is more important. But it's not only important for me to know how Jesus lived, but also how he preached because I'm a preacher.

Paul was a great preacher too, but he's not really my example as much as Jesus. And I see in Jesus' preaching, the sharpness. I mean, sharpness does not mean hitting people and hurting them.

I mean, when he said, render to Caesar what is Caesar's gift to God, what is God's, was he cutting somebody? When he said he was without sin, throw the first stone, he wasn't criticizing anybody personally. So, don't misunderstand what sharp sword means. Some people misunderstand that.

They think sharp sword means you're like that and you're like that and you're like that. Sharp sword. That is the whip of the hireling who does not know how to be a shepherd.

Sharp sword means God's word goes like an arrow into people's hearts. They get convicted. So, we must make sure that the devil doesn't get an advantage over us, that our swords are all blunt in the day of battle.

How does he make sure? What does it mean to take the blacksmiths away? It means there's nobody to sharpen our sword. I mean, the Holy Spirit, if you respond to him and listen to God speaking to us through his word, our sword will always remain sharp. I would encourage all of you to meditate on that passage and ask yourself, Lord, what are the ways in which the devil is trying to make my life blunt? There are many things you can get out of that one passage.

So that in the day of battle, you don't have a sword. See how Jesus, in the day of battle, we can take two examples. One is when he was confronting the devil.

That's one area of battle. And the other is when he's confronting people. That's another area of battle.

We have two areas of battle in our life too. One is with Satan. And when Jesus confronted Satan, every time he had a sharp sword.

The devil says, turn the stones into bread. He doesn't curse the devil and say, ah, you wretched fellow, get away. No, no, no.

All these pastors who shout and yell to cast out demons, they don't have any power. No, the devil has got good hearing. Jesus once said something and miles away, in one house, the demon left this girl's daughter.

This woman's daughter. You remember that? This woman, she was not even an Israelite. Syrophenician.

She must have asked her daughter, come with me. The demon would have said, no, don't go with your mother. I want to be with you here.

So she refused to go. Mother had to go alone to Jesus. One father brought his son to Jesus once, but this girl wouldn't come with the mother.

That's no problem for Jesus. The demon is there and his daughter miles away. Because of the mother's faith.

Do you believe that with our faith we can help our children? I have experienced that numerous times. Don't miss out on one of these privileges of yours. This mother said, my daughter is like this.

The devil has got a hold of her. She won't come even to the meeting. She doesn't want to meet you.

Jesus tests her first. Will you humble yourself? If I call you a dog, will you humble yourself? Anything Lord. Anything.

Just deliver my daughter. When you have that attitude. Lord, anything.

Deliver my children from the grip of Satan. Deliver people in my church from the grip of Satan. It doesn't matter if they are not interested.

Jesus spoke a word. He spoke a word. It was like a soul.

Miles away the demon left. I remember once when I was preaching in a Bible college. And with a whisper.

May the demon listen. It was 30-40 feet away. So, don't think sharp sword means shouting.

I heard a story of a preacher. He had his points written down. There is nothing wrong in that.

In fact, I would encourage all of you to do that. Because your sermons will be 100 times better. The only people who need not do that are those who got a very good memory.

It is written all down here. Or those who know the Bible thoroughly. But most of us are not like that.

So, it is good for us to plan ahead when we speak. So that we don't miss out on anything that we have to speak. Anyway, this preacher had his points down.

Four or five points. And he had written there. Point number three.

This is a weak point. So, bang the table and shout loud. I have never forgotten that.

When I hear somebody yelling and screaming, I say, Ah, that's a weak point there. Now, there can be a fervency of spirit. That's another thing.

But a lot of the yelling and screaming that we find many people do, it's not fervency of the Holy Spirit. Because I can't picture Jesus yelling and screaming. Like that.

We must be fervent in our spirit. Burning fire. But it's not always manifested by noise and shouting.

So, don't misunderstand. So, we need to ask ourselves, how can we keep our sword sharp? Jesus, first of all, against the devil. One word.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God. That's it. No discussion like Eve had with Satan in Eden.

That's what God's word says. As far as I'm concerned, it's finished. You know, there are so many people who argue about so many things in God's word.

I don't argue with them. And I don't even tell them what to do. I say, this is what God's word says.

I do it. But some things in God's word are not necessary for salvation. For example, if you are not baptized properly.

Or you never take baptism even after you are saved. You can still go to heaven. Definitely.

Baptism is not a condition for being born again. You don't have to be baptized in the Holy Spirit to go to heaven. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is for life on the earth, not in heaven.

To serve God effectively here. Not for salvation and going to heaven. Speaking in tongues.

It's not necessary for heaven. In fact, in heaven, we will not speak in tongues. That's just to edify myself in the midst of a discouraging world.

So, we don't tell people, you must do this, you must do that. But for us, God's word is enough. And we give other people freedom to disagree.

Some brothers don't believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Okay, fine. But I don't believe you can be an elder in a church and be effective if you don't believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

I find the gift of tongues very useful at certain times. It's like my little finger. It's not essential for life.

But it's useful. I don't want to cut it off. I don't want to make it 12 feet long either.

Can you imagine if all of us had 12 foot little fingers, how we would be able to sit here? We will be just hurting each other everywhere we go. That's how people hurt others with tongues, tongues, tongues, tongues, tongues everywhere they talk about. But for Jesus, no discussion.

It's written in God's word, finished. Take this matter of wearing gold. For me, it's just written.

Let it not be gold, pearls, costly stones. It's finished for me. There's no discussion on that.

Other Christians can discuss for years. They can do that. It's none of my business.

I give them freedom. But for me, it is written. That's enough for me.

Those who want to discuss, have to discuss with somebody else, not with me. The devil says, but this, but that. And the people say, yeah, this, this, this.

Okay, discuss with the devil. You can't discuss it with me. So, I want to ask you a question.

Is it is written enough for you? I don't mean holding it in a legalistic spirit. See, legalistic spirit is where you demand that everybody else should do what you do. See, I heard of a brother.

He, he had this conviction. No ornaments. But one sister will come with ornaments.

His whole message will change. Now he's speaking against ornaments for the next half an hour. You know what the devil says about such people? I can make this fellow preach any message I want.

He may come with the most powerful message to the meeting. The devil says, I can change that. I'll just get one woman to come there who doesn't cover her head.

He will change his message automatically. For the next half an hour, he'll only be speaking about that. Or some girl will come in jeans.

Boy, the message changes everything. This fellow is not a man of God. He is a man I can twirl round my finger with any day I want.

Or I'll make a man come and sit with a cap on his head. The devil says, you think I can't make these preachers preach what I want them to preach? Are you like that? You change your message because you saw somebody sitting there, somebody sitting there, somebody sitting there. You're not a servant of God.

You're a servant of the devil. Discover it today. Say, Lord, the devil's not going to change what God's put on my heart.

There were some prostitutes who'd come and sit in Jesus' meeting. Did he suddenly speak about prostitution and adultery and all that? No. Or let's take the time when he was always sitting with his disciples.

He always sees Judas sitting there. And always his message is, you know, there are some people who are stealing money. All the Gospels would have been only full of that message.

The devil had no power over Jesus. He heard his father and he spoke that. Let a hundred Judas's sit there.

Dear brothers, does the devil twirl you round his finger? And you think you're a great man of God, prophet, speaking? I hope you've discovered today what you really are. Jesus is the true prophet. Never once did he preach to Judas.

He preached the truth. Those who want to hear it can hear it. Those who don't want to hear it, they don't have to hear it.

We are to be shepherds. Do you know the difference between a shepherd and a dog? Dog. Dog.

You know, we have watchdogs. Anybody whom they don't recognize, soon they start barking as soon as they come to the house. Known people, they keep quiet.

Some preachers are like that. Fellow is doing something which I don't like. That sister is not dressed the way I like.

And the watchdog starts. It doesn't stop. That's the problem.

Keeps on. Dear brothers, Let's be men of God. Let's make Jesus our example.

Let's make sure the blacksmith is not robbed from our heart. Let me swing furiously and shout, but the sword is blunt. So, You know, I have seen in Christendom that some people think the way to make the sword sharp is to have lots of Bible schools.

You think these Bible schools are producing people with sharp swords? Not at all. They are making the fellows who went into the Bible school with a sharp sword, the sword is becoming blunt when they come out after four years. They have got a certificate now, not a sword.

They can get a job. They can get a job now. That doesn't mean we are better.

You know the disease called Pendulumitis? Have you seen these old clocks where they have these pendulums swinging like this? So, a lot of Christians are like that. This Bible school, wretched thing. I swing to the other extreme.

I don't study the Bible. I just get up and speak whatever comes to my mind. I don't know what I am going to say.

At the end of the meeting, nobody else knew what you said either. What wonderful leading of the Holy Spirit that is. This is called Pendulumitis.

It's like two ditches. Those Bible school fellows have fallen over one ditch and you have just fallen over the ditch on the other side. And the devil doesn't care which side you fall over.

Do you realize that many of us are at the bottom, just like those Bible school people? The Philistines have done a fantastic job. They have got rid of the blacksmiths. They have prevented you from seriously studying God's Word.

They have prevented you from applying it to your life. They have prevented you from applying it to your life. That's another way to blunt your sword.

Don't apply it to your life. Or watch plenty of television. That not only can waste your time.

There are images there that can haunt you in your dreams. I am not against television. Television or internet.

In fact internet is worse than television. Because in television you can't get whatever filthy thing you want. In internet you can.

But I am not against these. I don't use them. It's like a library.

We are not against books just because there are a lot of bad books in the library. We just say, don't go to that section. There are a lot of other good books in the library.

There are Christian books in the library. So, but there are many ways in which the Philistines are seeking to blunt the sword. Unconfessed sin.

You shouted your wife and you don't apologize to her. So many ways to make the sword blunt. The blacksmiths are gone.

And in the day of battle, there is no sword. So with the devil, just God's word. That's it.

It is written. Other people can discuss. I am not discussing.

Other people may say, Brother Zak, that's not the main thing. I know. I know it's not the main thing.

But why did an all wise God put it in scripture then? To test you. To see whether you will also care for his little commandments. You know who is a great person in heaven? Jesus said two things.

And I want to keep both of them in mind. Matthew chapter 18 I don't want to be great on earth, but I certainly want to be great in heaven. When I say great in heaven, I am not talking about ruling on some throne in heaven.

That's not what I mean. I don't plan to sit on any throne in heaven. I plan to serve even when I get to heaven.

And to worship. Not to sit on any throne. You know there are songs people sing.

I got a mansion up in heaven. I am waiting for that. What do you do if you get a 20 room mansion in heaven? Sit there and lie down on the bed.

Is that what you are going to do in heaven? If God gives me that, I will say you can have it. I don't want it. I give it to one of the other brothers.

Take it. I don't want to sit in a... I am not going to sleep. These are all picture language.

Because big houses are valuable on earth, God used that picture to say you are going to get something valuable. That's what it means. So, remember, who is great in heaven? Matthew chapter 18.

Verse 4. Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So, I want to be like a child. That means trusting my father.

No anxiety. Do you know that a one year old child has got no anxiety? There may be no money in the bank. The child sleeps peacefully.

There may be serious problems in the house. The child sleeps peacefully. There may be war.

A child sleeps peacefully. No anxiety, no fear because he knows his father is there to take care of him. Have you seen a little... I have often meditated on those newborn babies.

One month old and all. And you know how people come to visit newborn children. Let's say there is a newborn child born let's say in our church.

And all the families come to see this child. Everybody says what a beautiful child. Where is somebody? Not at all, not at all.

If one thousand people come and say what a beautiful child. Not even an atom of increase in pride or any such thing in that child. It's death.

So many gifts. Somebody steals those gifts also the child is not bothered. What a wonderful thing to be a child.

I say Lord I want to be like that. Whatever a thousand people may say doesn't make a difference. That's the greatest person in heaven.

Humble like a child. You want to be a good elder? Be like a child. That's why many of us are not successful elders.

It's to be great in God's eyes like the angel said about John the Baptist. He would be great in the sight of the Lord. That's the meaning of greatness in heaven.

Great in the sight of the Lord. The second person who is great in heaven or the second quality of a person who is great in heaven is in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 19. Whoever cancels the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever keeps and teaches the least will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. That verse teaches us there are big commandments and small commandments. Jesus himself said that.

Which are the big commandments? Don't kill. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal.

Don't tell lies. Live an upright life. Don't covet.

You preach all that? No marks. Good. A lot of people in the world also preach all that.

But you take the small commandments. Why has God kept these small commandments in the Bible? To test who wants to be great in heaven. Now you can take the small commandments and preach it like a legalist.

Make it essential for salvation. Or you can't be a part of our church if you don't do this. Then you've got pendulomitis again.

That's the trouble. They read a verse like this and they become first class legalists. I'm going to be great in heaven.

I'm going to preach all the small commandments in the Bible. Be a child first. So it's the spirit in all these things.

Dear brothers, let me give you a very simple example. Legalism is where you want other people to do what you believe is right. But if you're not a legalist, you still do it.

And you get freedom. Do other people? If you don't want to do it, don't do it. And you love them just the same.

See, I mean, I have, I personally have a conviction that I should not wear gold. God is my witness. I don't impose that law on anybody in the world.

To the extent that I even have prayed a prayer like this. Lord, help me when I look at a sister, not even to notice whether she's wearing ornaments or not. And certainly not to judge whether she's spiritual or not just by ornaments.

And God has answered my prayer. Number of times somebody comes to me. Brother Zack, did you notice that sister you were talking to was wearing ornaments? I can honestly say, I didn't even notice it.

I said, Lord, that's amazing. With eyes wide open, can I be blind? Okay, the fellow said it to me, so next time I speak to a sister, I should be observing that. And it happens again.

I didn't notice it. I said, Lord, you are a God who answers the most impossible prayers. I have convictions which have never changed in 30 years.

But my tolerance of other people has changed a lot. Because I was a legalist once. And a very miserable person who made other people miserable too.

I'm a very happy person today. I was telling somebody the other day, I wonder if there's anybody happier than me in the whole world. I mean, I can't imagine anybody happier than me, because I'm happy all the time.

I mean, if somebody can be happy for 25 hours in a day, then maybe he beats me. But otherwise, no. But if it's only 24 hours, he just gets first prize along with me.

That's all. I'm equal. Nobody can make me miserable.

I mean, I'm surrounded by people who are trying to make me happy. They take me to court and make me happy there. All because of Romans 828.

I'm going to shake Paul's hand in heaven and say, brother, thank you for Romans 828 that you wrote. And I said, Paul, how did you get that revelation? He says, Zach, that was my experience. I said, that's right.

That was my experience too. Even if you had not written it, I would have discovered it. Make your sword sharp.

Believe God's word. That God's word is exactly as it says. When he says, all things will work for your good, it will work for your good if you believe it.

Otherwise, even if it works for your good, you'll still be miserable because you don't believe it. So, it's great to make sure our sword is sharp. I want to say another word in connection with this about legalism.

See, for example, supposing you've got a good habit of reading the Bible every morning at whatever time you get up. Excellent habit, reading the Bible, praying. And then you impose that on other people.

Brothers, get up at 5.30 every morning. Spend one hour reading the Bible and praying. That's where it becomes legalism.

But you can get up at 3.30 if you like. That's discipline. Discipline is good.

Legalism is bad. Discipline, you can never be a holy person without discipline in your personal life. Discipline in time, discipline in money, discipline in eating, discipline in many things.

But the moment you impose that discipline on others, you have become a legalist. You think spirituality is only the way you do it. Or even if you don't make people do it, you think in your mind when you see that fellow.

This guy, look at him, indisciplined fellow. He gets up at 5.30, I get up at 3.30. By the way, let me tell you, I don't get up at 3.30 or 5.30. I sometimes go to sleep at 1.30. So, don't think spirituality is in all these things. It's much more important to obey God's word.

Read it in order to obey it. What time you read it is up to you. But not everybody has time in the morning like you may have.

I know when my children were small, if I spend one hour with the Bible, my wife will have to do all the work with the children. So, when I am studying Hebrews, God's word to me is close your Bible and go and help your wife. Let the children go to school and all that.

When you have little spare time, you read the Bible. See, I'll tell you this, a lot of people who get up very early in the morning, you go and ask them how much do you help your wife in the morning, zero. Let me ask all of you here, don't give the answer publicly.

Especially those of you who are proud of what early morning you get up. Tell me honestly, how much do you help your wife in the morning? Isn't the answer zero? Isn't that what Jesus would do in the morning? Wives struggling and struggling and you are sitting holy man with the Bible. I tell you, I don't want to be like you.

I want to be like Jesus. I want to be a help to other people. If you want to do that, get up one hour before your wife then do it.

But so many wrong ideas we have about spirituality. I have heard numerous preachers say, get up so and so time and spend one hour with the Bible and all that. I have never heard one preacher except me preach, get up early and help your wife in the morning.

Why is that? Why? Because people think reading the Bible is a holy thing, helping your wife. Ah, that's a worldly thing. This is how the sword is blunt.

And we produce a bunch of people like that in our churches who don't know how to fellowship with their wives. Let me ask you one thing. God made Eve to be a helper to his wife, husband.

How much does your wife help you spiritually? I'm not asking whether she helps you cooking your food, washing your clothes and all these things. Is she born again? I think most of you can say your wives are

born again. I hope all of you.

A born again person, a child of God, can help you zero spiritually? How's that? Does she have some contact with God? Maybe her pipe is not so big like yours to get so much water coming through. Maybe her contact with God is narrow but she has got something to give. And your ministry would have become very much richer if you had been humble enough to seek fellowship with her.

Many of you who pray so much, how much do you pray with your wives? You say she's not interested. Well, you were also not interested when your heavenly husband married you. You did not interested in many things.

But how you got suddenly interest in so many spiritual things today? Because your heavenly husband worked with this lazy wife and changed her not by whipping you and made you a co-worker with him. I say, Lord Jesus make me like you. One who can work with a wife and make her a co-worker.

How much better your ministry would be? Instead of saying, ah, she's not interested, I have to spend time with the brothers, that's all. Imagine if Jesus had treated you like that. Ah, this guy is not interested, get rid of him.

Let me try somebody else. Thank God he didn't treat us like that. That our heavenly husband did not give up on us.

I think of numerous times I have let him down so badly. Even, it brings tears to my eyes even now. But no condemnation.

Because remember I told you I am a happy man 24 hours. Because I believe in the blood of Jesus. Not only Romans 8.28 but the blood of Jesus too.

That deals with my past completely. But I am thankful that he worked with me. And when I was slow in my progress he said never mind we'll do it.

Let's use every possible method to keep our sword sharp. Your wife could perhaps be a good blacksmith. You don't use her? To sharpen your sword? Let's pray.

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