

I Woke the Dungeon Flamed with Light

Heb 4:12-13

Text: (ESV) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

I. Intro:

- A. I saw a commercial on television this past week. It advertised a book service you could subscribe to and listen to a variety of books. At the end of the commercial one guy said something to the effect that the books changed him. They gave him a different perspective.¹
- B. I have a book in my house that my parents read to me when I was a child. It is a 1935 Childcraft called The Child's Treasury. It has the stories of The Three Little Pigs, The Fox and the Grapes, The Hare and the Tortoise, The Lion and the Mouse and many more.
 - 1. I am sure those stories helped shape the way I viewed the world. Children (and adults) naturally see things through only one perspective – their own. That is in part why we are selfish, lazy, prone to lie, proud and all of those kinds of things.
 - 2. The stories and fables help shape our view of the world by letting us see ourselves through the characters in the stories.
 - a. For example, take the Hare and the Tortoise. We all know the story, a boastful and proud hare challenges a tortoise to a race. The hare takes off and gets way ahead of the tortoise and decides to take a nap to show his contempt for the tortoise. The tortoise kept on and beat the hare.
 - b. It is hard for a person, on their own, to see their faults. Through The Hare and the Tortoise though, we can see what pride looks like. Seeing pride in the hare helps us see it in ourselves. We can also see through the tortoise what perseverance looks like and what it can bring us. So we learn not to give up and quit.
- C. Books and stories help take us outside of ourselves and getting outside of our self helps us to grow and change.

II. Our text this morning talks about the word of God – Scripture - and how it reveals our thoughts and intentions. Now of all of the books in the world that play a part in shaping lives, the Bible has clearly had a great influence over many lives for many years. People have read this book for thousands of years and have had their lives shaped and influenced by it.

- A. According to a 2016 Gallup poll 74% of Americans identify with a Christian religion.²
- B. According to that same poll, 72% of Americans believe that religion is losing its influence in society. Now there are going to be a variety of reasons for that; the intermingling of faith and politics; the failure of Christians to live a more

¹ <https://youtu.be/vVBEo9IGUWo>

² <https://news.gallup.com/poll/200186/five-key-findings-religion.aspx>

spotless life is perceived by non-Christians as a hypocrisy that proves our faith is not worthy of belief; and a host of other reasons.

- C. One of those other reasons as to why some people see Christianity losing its influence is due to their view of the Bible. They no longer see the Bible as relevant due to the time period in which it was written. It is outdated. Given all of the changes that have taken place since the Bible was written, how can anyone still read it and take it seriously? It is 3500 years old. The world has changed, a lot. Our knowledge of the universe and world have changed. “Why would anyone turn to such an antiquated book and do what it says?” is the question.

- 1. That is a valid question. The world has changed. Our knowledge of the world has changed over the past 3500 years. The Bible has not. How can it still be relevant in a changing world?

III. Let’s take a look at a pretty big change in knowledge that took place about 400 years ago.

- A. Aristotle, about 350 before Christ, taught that the earth was at the center of the universe. The closest object to earth he taught was the Moon, then Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and then Saturn. And these all revolved around the earth.

- 1. Ptolemy, an Egyptian mathematician and astronomer, further developed Aristotle’s view of a geocentric (earth-centered) universe. A geocentric view of our solar system was the prevailing view for about 2000 years or so.
 - 2. Then Copernicus came along in the mid-1500s and put forward the idea that the earth and all of the planets revolved around the sun. Galileo pulled out his telescope in the 1600s and demonstrated that Copernicus’ idea of a heliocentric (sun-centered) universe was how our solar system was structured.
 - 3. Talk about change. That was a pretty big change in knowledge. Man’s knowledge of the structure of the whole universe changed. Aristotle’s and Ptolemy’s long held belief was obsolete. A new math and astronomy and scientific tools came along and the old books on astronomy were suddenly out of date - no longer relevant.

- B. It is that kind of thing that leads people to conclude that the Bible is no longer relevant. It is outdated, just like the views of Aristotle and Ptolemy.

- 1. The problem with that thinking is that it throws out too much. Aristotle and Ptolemy’s view of the structure of the universe was no longer valid, but that does not mean everything they thought was wrong.
 - 2. Whenever there is change, there are always some things that do not change. The planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars and Saturn were still in our solar system. The sun and the moon were still there. The math he used to make some of his calculations did not change. Some of his contributions to map making did not change.
 - a. Even though there was this great change in the way in which the world was viewed, **everything** in the world did not change. **There were and are some core things that do not change, even when everything around us changes.**

- IV. Right before we began our study in Hebrews, we spent some time studying the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are the first 5 books of the OT. God gave the first 4 books to Moses while they were at Mt Sinai, shortly after they left Egypt. (Genesis through Numbers 11 were probably all written early on by Moses.) Deuteronomy was written toward the end of the time in the wilderness, after most of the first generation died due to unbelief, and just before the second generation was about to enter the Promise Land.
- A. There are things in Deuteronomy that are different than Exodus through Numbers.
1. For example, the reason for keeping the Sabbath in Ex 20 is said to be because when God created the heavens and the earth he rested on the 7th day. However, when we come to Dt. 5 the reason for resting on the Sabbath day is so that Israel would remember how God rescued them from their slavery in Egypt.
 2. Another difference, Exodus does not mention it, but Deuteronomy does 3 times in chapter 12 (verses 5, 11, 14). Deuteronomy talks about Israel worshipping God in one place, the place God chooses. Exodus does not.
 3. There are a lot of other changes. Now why in the world would God give Moses Exodus through Numbers with its laws and then 40 years later give him Deuteronomy with different laws in it?
 4. The best explanation for this is that right from the start God knew that time and circumstances would change in the lives of his people through the ages. They did for the crowd in the wilderness – in less than 40 years. This second generation started thinking what life would be like once they entered the Promised Land. It was certainly going to be different than life in the wilderness. Things were going to be different.
 - a. So, what God does with the book of Deuteronomy is demonstrate how his unchanging word is applied in a changing world. God is not tossing Exodus through Numbers out due to the circumstantial changes taking place. Deuteronomy 1:5 says that Moses set out to “explain” the law God gave his people in the wilderness. He set out to take the law given in the wilderness and apply it to the changing situation God’s people found themselves in.
 - b. Through Deuteronomy God demonstrates how to apply his word to a changing world and changing situations. His word remains and is the authority to direct his people how to live in a changing world.
 - c. In the midst of change – some things do not change³. God’s word is one of those core things that does not change and does not become outdated.
- V. I saw another commercial on television this week. It is the Pfizer commercial “Science Will Win”⁴. It was well done. It begins with the line “**In a time when things are most uncertain we turn to the most certain thing there is – science.**” And it goes on to extol the things science brings to us. The commercial is designed to give us some assurance in the midst of the coronavirus. Science will find a way to create therapies and a vaccine. Science will win out over the virus.

³ Jerry Root The Surprising Imagination of C S Lewis p. 46.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI0tEfLve1U>

- A. Science is a great tool. It is a field of study to go into. It contributes greatly to many areas of our life. We all expect that before too long there will be effective therapies against the virus and a vaccine. And science will bring that to us.
- B. But science does not cause the Scriptures to be outdated. And the reason for that is that there is more to this world and our life than material things. There are things science can't fix. And one of those things is human nature.
 - 1. For example: Science created nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons brought an end to a horrible world war. The threat of their use has quite possibly kept us out of another world war.
 - 2. But, science can't stop some nut leader who has a nuclear weapon from launching it. It might create a device to intercept it. But it cannot stop an egotistical maniac from pushing the button.
 - 3. There is always a human factor.
 - 4. In this coronavirus – science will probably come up with a vaccine or therapy. But there is always a human factor that science has no power to change without violating the free will of an individual. The greed and scheming of someone to make a plan to swindle people out of their money; the stress that comes from financial hardships and loss of income for some; the grief that comes to the families who suffer a death in the family due to the virus; the callousness of some who have no empathy or respect for those who are having a much harder time than they are with this virus....and the list goes on. There is always a human factor that comes into play in everything every day.
 - 5. And this is where the unchanging word of God comes into our life and demonstrates its power and relevance in our changing world. It is why we are about the business of the Great Commission. God's word as our text says "is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." God's word can and does speak to that human factor or human nature in each of us.
 - 6. Science is a great tool. But we must have more than that.
- C. C S Lewis in the Pilgrim's Regress tells the story of a man named John who is on a search and along the way he runs into a variety of people who have their own philosophies and views of life. They are named like John Bunyan named his characters in Pilgrim's Progress. They are named after their respective philosophical views.
 - 1. One of the groups of people in the book towards the end are the Stay at Homes.⁵ They are the people who think that everything everywhere is like it is in their own village – even if other villages have never heard of it. They are provincial – that is they only know what is in their own village. And if they happen to hear of something else – well, they think it is backwards.
 - a. Stay at Homes are narrow-minded. The only world they see is through their own eyes. They are unexposed or unopen to other views and realities.
 - 2. God's word allows us to see the world through more than just our own eyes. It opens us up to see ourselves the way God sees us. It does what all good

⁵ Pilgrim's Regress chapter 8 History's Words p.151

books do. His word takes us beyond our narrowly focused view of ourselves and others to see ourselves and the world from a different perspective.

3. And it does so, in a way ordinary books cannot. The Bible comes to us with a power to change us internally. It comes with the Holy Spirit who regenerates us; makes us new creations in Christ Jesus. It leads us to repent of our sins and to follow one who is far greater than we are. Jesus Christ.
 4. And that makes it the most relevant book we will ever read and study. It deals with the human factor in all of us. It corrects and rebukes us. It calls us to repentance and faith. It comforts us when we are afraid and gives us hope in our grief. It calls us to have compassion and empathy for those who are struggling. So, if there is ever a need for such a book it is now.
- D. One of the great hymns of the Christian faith is And Can It Be. In that hymn Wesley writes – Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose went forth and followed thee.
1. God's word illuminates and pierces the dungeon of our soul and spirit and leads us to new life in Christ. Nothing else, but God's word has such power in this world. Read it. Study it. And ask God to illuminate your heart and mind.
 2. **"In a time when things are most uncertain we turn to the most certain thing there is" - God's unchanging word.** It works. It changed us. And for those who don't know - who might be a bit Stay At Homeish – it can make a difference in you too.