

“An Anchor for the Soul: Living and Active”

Hebrews 4:9-14

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
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The Bible has long been the best selling, most widely distributed book of all time. It's estimated that worldwide over 100 million Bibles are sold or given away every year with more than a fourth of them in the United States. The Bible clearly contains the most cherished words ever published. But it is also the most hated, ridiculed, criticized, banned, and destroyed book ever. Throughout history people have tried to get rid of the Bible and one of the ways they have used is to try to disprove the Bible. Many of them, however, discover that the Bible is true and end up as committed followers of Jesus.

Simon Greenleaf was a law professor at Harvard in the early nineteenth century and is considered one of the greatest legal minds in American history. His book, *Treatise on the Law of Evidence* became the textbook on legal evidence for decades and is still studied today. Dr. Greenleaf thought that the resurrection of Jesus was a myth and he decided to apply his rules of evidence to prove, once and for all, that it was a hoax. But after thoroughly studying the evidence, Dr. Greenleaf came to the opposite conclusion. He decided that the overwhelming evidence was that Jesus really was raised from the dead and Greenleaf committed his life to Christ, becoming one of the great evangelists of the time.

In 1979, Lee Strobel's wife became a Christian. He had a Yale Law degree and was working as the legal editor and investigative reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. He was also an atheist. So Strobel set out to find out the truth about Christianity. In a sense, he says, he was trying to disprove it to his wife. Instead, he was converted. He wrote about his experience in his book, *The Case for Christ*.

In the late 1990s, Rosaria Butterfield was a tenured English and women's studies professor at Syracuse University and she had no love for Christianity. She set out to expose Christians as a fraud. She says, "I began researching the

Religious Right and their politics of hatred against queers like me. To do this, I would need to read the one book that had, in my estimation, gotten so many people off track: the Bible. I continued reading the Bible, all the while fighting the idea that it was inspired. But the Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. It overflowed into my world. I fought against it with all my might."

What Rosaria Butterfield discovered is the same thing that Lee Strobel and Simon Greenleaf and Josh McDowell and C.S. Lewis and countless others have discovered. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and 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."

This is probably one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. But we need to remember the context of these verses. This was an encouragement and a warning to that small house church in Rome facing persecution. The writer of Hebrews is still pointing them to the disobedience of the Israelites in the wilderness. Because of their disobedience they did not get to enter God's rest in the Promised Land. What was their disobedience? Unbelief. Hebrews 4:2 says, "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." He's saying, "don't let that happen to you. Don't fall by that same sort of disobedience. Why? Because the word of God is living and active. It penetrates to the core. No one can hide from God." So let's look at each of these statements.

First, what does it mean that the word of God is *living*? Some today argue that this shows us that the meaning of the Bible changes over time. That's not at all what it means. Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O Lord, your word is

firmly fixed in the heavens.” Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” The word of God is living because it’s the words of the living God. But they don’t change because God doesn’t change.

The word of God is also living because it is the work of the Holy Spirit. As we heard from 2 Timothy, all Scripture is breathed out by God. The Greek word for spirit is also the word for breath. Through the Holy Spirit, God spoke through prophets and evangelists. Just as the Holy Spirit was present when the words were written, He’s present when they are read or heard. God is present every time the Bible is read or preached. Think about that. If you want to experience the presence of God in your life, all you have to do is open your Bible or show up for worship.

Second, the Bible is living and *active*. The word translated as active also means powerful or effective. Another way to translate it is that the Bible is at work. It’s the word from which we get our word energetic. The word of God is effective. Paul tells Timothy that Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” so that we who believe may be complete, equipped for every good work. When we read and hear the Bible, God himself teaches and transforms us. God speaks to you so that the Word comes alive in you

Isaiah 55 says, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” What is that purpose? What is the Word of God at work doing? Rick Phillips writes, “the Bible has one overarching theme: God’s work in history for the salvation of sinful people. The Bible’s message is God’s work of

salvation through Jesus Christ, and its purpose is actually to bring that salvation to individuals who receive that message and believe.” In other words, the living Word of God is active and effective at bringing life to us who were dead because of sin. That’s the message of the cross of Christ.

So how does the Word of God accomplish that purpose in our lives? By penetrating to our very core and convicting us of our sinfulness and our need for a savior. That’s why he says God’s word is sharper than any two-edged sword. When we submit ourselves to the Bible it cuts through all of our sin, all of our pretenses, all of our outward appearances and goes all the way to the center of who we are, our soul and spirit. As verse 13 points out, every one of us is naked and exposed before God. We have nowhere to hide from the judgment of God. And it’s not just our actions that God sees. Verse 12 says that God’s word discerns or judges the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Ouch. Jesus said the same thing. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus takes several commandments, such as the prohibitions against murder and adultery, and says that what matters most is your inner thoughts. God knows your thoughts and intentions.

So is there any good news here for us today? Well, it depends on your response. It seems to me that the two edges of the sword are warning and promise. This passage is a warning against rejecting the promises of God as the Israelites did in the wilderness. The result is missing the promised rest God. But this passage is also a reminder that for those who put their trust in Jesus and believe the promises of the Bible there is forgiveness and acceptance and eternal rest with him. As you fill your life with the Word of God your desires will be changed and it will overflow into all areas of your life.

Amen